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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains 29 articles about literacy that originally appeared in newspapers across Canada during September 1987. Many are based on the extensive findings of a national literacy survey of 2,398 Canadian adults commissioned by Southam Inc. The survey provided the first real statistics about the state of literacy in the country; interviews with more than 100 literacy workers and learners also put a human face on a problem that affects one in four adults. Among the topics discussed are the effect of immigration and bilingualism on the literacy rate, importance of literacy skills in the workplace, use of plain language in government documents, literacy in correctional and military education, and comparisons of Canadian and U.S. literacy. Ideas on how people can help combat the problem of illiteracy and tips for tutoring are included in the articles. (KC)

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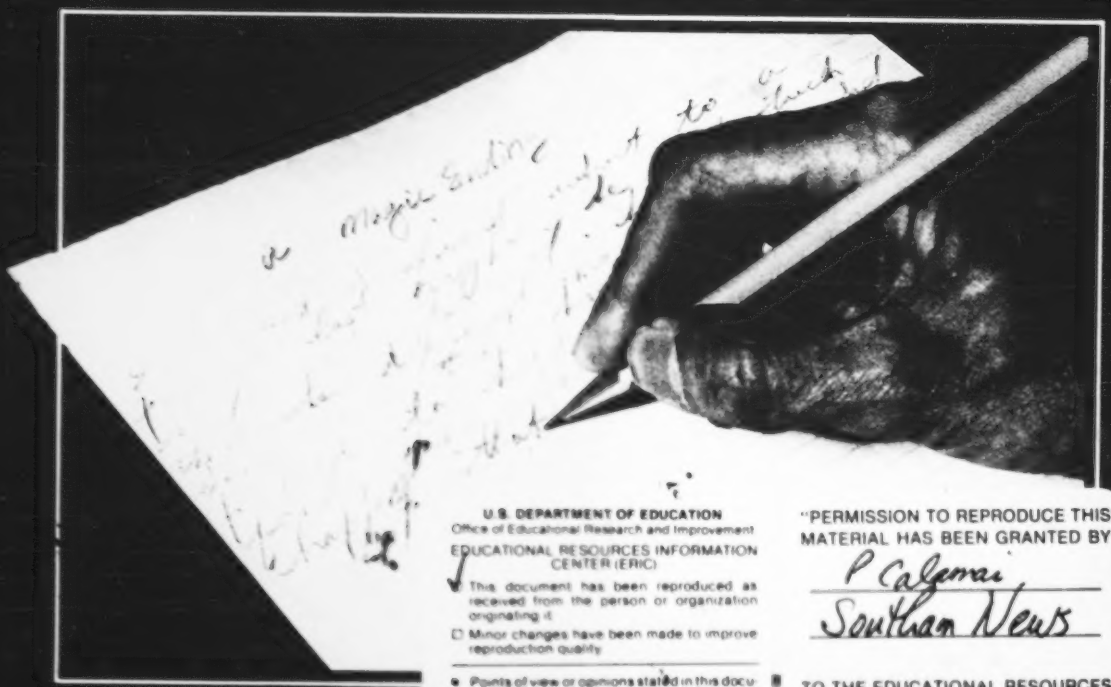

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A Special Southam Survey

Broken Words

Why Five Million Canadians are Illiterate

Southam Graphics: Rob Ludlow

A Special Southam Survey

Foreword

This booklet contains articles about literacy that originally appeared in newspapers across Canada during September, 1987. Many are based on the extensive findings of a national literacy survey of 2,398 Canadian adults commissioned by Southam Inc. While the survey provided the first real statistics about the state of literacy in the country, interviews with more than 100 literacy workers and learners also put a human face on a problem that affects one in four adults.

Illiteracy has often been called the hidden problem. In Canada, it's not so much hidden as ignored. As these articles make clear, both the provinces and the federal government have received repeated warnings about widespread problems with reading and writing.

But Canadians don't have to wait for government to act. Individuals can make a difference. Some ways you can help are described in this booklet.

What the reader won't find here, however, is a simple answer: that low literacy can be blamed on a lack of phonics in the primary grades, or on immigration, or on some ill-defined "learning disabilities".

If the solutions to illiteracy were that simple, Canada wouldn't have five million adults who need help.

Peter Calamai

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Need more information?

More information about literacy and about helping people with reading and writing problems can be obtained from the following national bodies:

Frontier College, 35 Jackes Avenue, Toronto, Ont., M4T 1E2 (416) 923-3591

Laubach Literacy of Canada, Box 6548, Station A, Saint John, N.B., E2L 4R9 (506) 642-4357

Movement for Canadian Literacy, Suite 304, 9 St. Joseph St., Toronto, Ont., M4Y 1J6, (416) 393-1995

National Literacy Secretariat, Department of the Secretary of State, Hull, Que., K1A 0M5 (819) 953-5280

Other sources of information include community colleges, the continuing education division at local school boards, community literacy groups and the Newspapers-in-Education co-ordinator at your local newspaper.

Additional copies of this $2 booklet can be obtained by writing to Literacy, Southam Newspaper Group, Suite 900, 150 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ont., M5S 2Y8.

Five million Canadians functionally illiterate

Five million Canadians cannot read, write or handle numbers well enough to meet the literacy demands of today's society — and one-third are high school graduates.

Five million adult Canadians are marching against their will in an army of illiterates.

But they are an army in numbers only. They have no leaders, no power, little support, few weapons and no idea where they are headed.

Darkness and hopelessness are usually their banners.

"No one who can read knows our anger," says one illiterate.

"You're left in the dark. You just try to carry on the best you can. We're living in a different world." An exclusive nationwide survey in 1987 disclosed that five million Canadians cannot read, write or use numbers well enough to meet the literacy demands of today's society — and one-third are high school graduates.

Half of these functional illiterates have been left out of past official estimates of illiteracy because they reached Grade 9 or better, the federal government's arbitrary definition of being literate.

The $295,000 Southam Literacy Survey, financed by Southam Inc., tested 2,398 adults in their homes in May and June with a battery of more than 40 literacy-related questions.

It actually identified 4.5 million Canadian residents who fail to reach a minimum level of functional literacy suggested by a national panel representing a cross-section of Canadians.

But Southam's researchers estimate they did not reach at least 500,000 more illiterate adults among unsurveyed groups of prisoners, transients, the mentally retarded, natives on reserves, people living north of the 60th parallel and all immigrants unable to speak either of Canada's official languages.

Even without this extra half million, 24 per cent of Canadian residents 18 and older are illiterate in English or French. Excluding all immigrants, illiteracy still affects 22 per cent of Canadian-born adults — more than one in five.

The picture is not totally black. Many illiterates say they are content with their limited reading and writing skills, even though half must get help from family or friends for tasks like reading government notices or product labels in supermarkets.

The survey's definition of functional literacy was the ability to use printed and written information to function in society. Experts agree this approach is more relevant today than the traditional definition of just being able to sign a name or read a simple sentence.

That definition produced these survey findings:

- Illiteracy increases from west to east, rising from a low of 17 per cent among adults in British Columbia to an astonishing high of 44 per cent in Newfoundland;
- Illiteracy is higher among francophones than anglophones — 29 per cent to 23 per cent — but the gap is biggest among the oldest and vanishes among the young;
- Nearly half of the 4.5 million functional illiterates identified in the survey are 55 or older, even though this group only accounts for 29 per cent of the total population;
- Half of the illiterates say they went to high school and one-third say they graduated. One in 12 who claimed to be university graduates still tested as functionally illiterate;
- Poverty and education play major roles in deciding whether illiteracy is transmitted from one generation to the next. The children of the jobless, the working class and the poorly educated are much more liable to be illiterate;
- Illiteracy is higher among men than women, 53.5 to 46.5 per cent.

In eight centres across Canada, additional people were interviewed to provide more detailed results: Vancouver scored best with 14 per cent functional illiteracy and Edmonton the worst with 33 per cent. But Vancouver had twice as many university graduates as the national average while relatively few Edmontonians went beyond high school.

Residents of Saint John, N.B., were more likely than the national average to say they needed help with common reading and writing

tasks; 30 per cent were classified as functionally illiterate.

For Canada's two largest cities, the rates were 23 per cent in Montreal and 27 per cent in Toronto where four in 10 of those surveyed were immigrants.

Elsewhere in Ontario, functional illiteracy ranged from 21 per cent in London and 23 per cent in Ottawa to 32 per cent for the rural area around Owen Sound, where 43 per cent did not get to high school.

For illiterates in these centres and across the country, theirs is a way of life that is growing, not shrinking as officials had forecast.

The survey and other Southam research strongly suggest 100,000 illiterates a year are being added to the Canadian population by a flawed education system and humanitarian immigration policies. Yet deaths, emigration and literacy training only reduce the ranks by an estimated 70,000 annually.

"It's not as life-threatening as AIDS, nor as terrible as mass murder, nor as current as acid rain," says McGill University education professor Jon Bradley of illiteracy in general. "But in the long run it could be a far more damaging threat to Canadian society." The dangers are stark: 10 per cent of Canadian adults can't understand the dosage directions on a medicine bottle; 20 per cent can't correctly select a fact from a simple newspaper article; 40 per cent can't figure out the tip on a lunch bill; more than 50 per cent have serious troubles using bus schedules; and nearly 60 per cent misinterpret the key section of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Charter of Rights and Freedoms

(Section 15)

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Question 1: Which of these two statements best summarizes what this section is trying to say?

A. Everyone is equal in Canada.

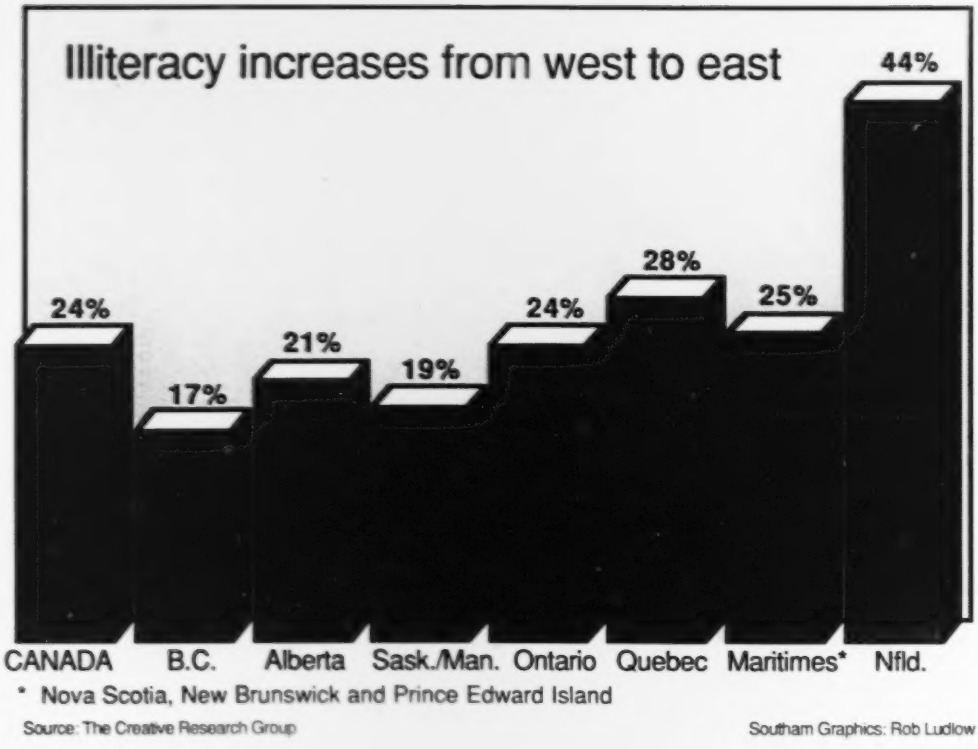
B. The law in Canada cannot favor one person over another.

Only 39 per cent correctly picked B.

Question 2: Mark any words in the section which spell out the kinds of inequal legal treatment that are not allowed in Canada.

The correct answer would be to underline any or all of the words from "without discrimination" on to the end of the paragraph. Fifty-four per cent answered correctly.

Source: The Creative Research Group — Southam Graphics: Rob Ludlow



Yet less than two per cent of the 4.5 million functional illiterates are now enrolled in the nation's inadequate literacy programs, some forced to turn away students because of chronic government underfunding. Governments in Canada give a much lower priority to adult education than those in Europe.

The Southam survey also discovered only one in 10 of all illiterates would ever consider taking remedial classes — bad news for the national literacy coalition which wants federal and provincial governments to provide free adult basic education.

Such classes don't guarantee literacy; drop-out rates of 50 per cent have been recorded. And success can be long and costly — several years of studying for the majority of illiterates who can only go to classes a few hours a week.

But there are 1.7 million Canadian adults who don't need to go to such literacy classes, even though the federal government has been insisting that they should. And there's another 2.4 million who should go, even though they're officially counted as literate.

These two sets of statistics arise from the official definition of functional illiteracy used to compile federal statistics — less than eight completed years of schooling. That definition produces about 3.75 million "official" adult functional illiterates.

But for 1.7 million, it's a bum rap; they're "false illiterates" who pass the Southam Literacy Test even though they never got as far as Grade 9.

"They're the untutored wise men and women of our society," says psychologist Paul Nesbitt. "Many were barred from going on with formal education but they've picked up what they can in a lifetime of learning." Also unmasked by the literacy survey were 2,400,000 "false literates" — roughly one in eight adults — people who went as far as Grade 9 but still tested as functionally illiterate.

"They're the cream of the illiterates," says Nesbitt of The Creative Research Group of Toronto which supervised the literacy survey. "But a lot of them just squeaked by the Grade 9 cutoff used by the government." Using that

arbitrary Grade 9 cutoff to label people meant that federal and provincial literacy policies have been missing their targets by 4.1 million people — the total of the 1.7 million false illiterates and the 2.4 million false literates.

Another seeming contradiction turned up by the literacy survey concerns working mothers.

Interviewers found an illiteracy rate of 27 per cent among the 1,541 adult Canadians in the survey whose mothers stayed at home while their children were in primary school, considered crucial years for literacy.

Among the 758 whose mothers worked, the illiteracy rate is much lower — 16 per cent.

The explanation requires further delving into these statistics.

It turns out this literacy gap shifts with different age groups. It's biggest between people now 55 or older, by almost a two-to-one margin favoring offspring who had working moms. And it disappears for the youngest adults, aged 18 to 34.

An even closer look reveals the working mothers of literate offspring more often had jobs as executives, professionals or sales and clerical staff.

"Women who worked in the '40s and '50s tended to come from upper-class families so the homes had strong literacy influences," speculates Nesbitt.

Ourwords: the frustrations of being illiterate

It's having documents shoved in front of you and being told to sign and not worry about what it says.

literacy learner, Saint John, N.B.

How the Southam Literacy Survey was done

The literacy survey by Southam News is based on face-to-face interviews with 2,398 adults in 148 Canadian communities and rural areas. Respondents were selected at 418 sampling points.

Three samples were drawn for the survey: a random cross-section of the entire population, extra samples for some cities and regions, and a special oversample of 21- to 25-year-olds.

Excluded from the survey are those under 18, residents north of the 60th parallel, transients, members of the armed forces, natives living on reserves and anyone in an institution, such as a prison, hospital or nursing home.

Interviews were conducted in English or French in the respondents' homes between May 6 and June 10, 1987. The results have been weighted to ensure that each segment is represented in proportion to its share of the population.

In particular, the results were weighted to reflect the most recent Statistics Canada data on how far Canadians went in school.

Following general industry practice, all respondents were given two $1 lottery tickets to be interviewed.

Literacy was defined as reading and writing skills in either of Canada's two official languages. Extra steps were taken to learn as much as possible about potential respondents who spoke neither English nor French.

An average interview took 80 minutes and involved two parts: a background and activity questionnaire followed by a test of reading, writing and numbers skills using five dozen items based on everyday life.

These items were adapted from a 1985 U.S. survey for the National Assessment of Educational Progress by substituting Canadian spellings, materials and topical references.

Respondents could take as long as they liked to tackle the literacy items. The tasks were divided into two smaller and overlapping sets, each of 40 items answered by half the respondents.

People were handed copies of the items to be read, which they could hold on to while answering. They didn't have to rely on memory.

Literacy in reading newspaper articles was measured using two specially printed newspapers, in English and French. The papers were printed by the *Ottawa Citizen*, with cooperation from *Le Droit*, Ottawa's French-language daily.

An outside literacy consultant, Jean-Paul Hautecoeur, advised on the French-language adaptation. Ten other experts in literacy, adult education and journalism provided extensive advice on the design of the background questionnaire.

The standards for literacy and illiteracy were determined by a 25-member panel.

Although the total sample is 2,398, the national picture is based on a weighted sample of 1,503. In 19 cases out of 20, results based on a theoretical random sample of this size will differ by no more than 2.5 percentage points in either direction from the results obtained by interviewing all adult Canadians.

Two specially printed newspapers were used to measure literacy in reading newspaper articles — The Independent and L'Independent.

The theoretical margin of error is larger for smaller groups, such as those in only one region, in a specific age group or with a certain level of schooling. Results for Ontario only, for example, could theoretically differ by four percentage points while those for immigrants have a range of 6.5 percentage points either way.

The full technical report of the survey may be purchased at $50 per copy. Write: Southam Literacy Survey, Anne Labelle, Southam News, Suite 512, 151 Sparks St., Ottawa, Ont., K1P 5E3. Researchers or educational bodies interested in computer data tapes can contact Labelle at the same address.

Ownwords: the frustrations of being illiterate

It's something like being an alcoholic. You have to get someone to admit to themselves that they can't read, that they need outside help and that outside help will make a difference.

Bill Shallow, adult educator, Newfoundland

Jury still out on what determines functional illiteracy

A 25-member panel of representative Canadians decided which reading tasks ordinary adults should be able to answer correctly just to get by in today's society.

Are you a functional illiterate? You probably are if you can't:

- Read and understand the right dosage from an ordinary bottle of cough syrup (10 per cent of adult Canadians can't);
- From six road signs, pick out which one warns of a traffic light ahead (13 per cent can't);
- Figure out the change from $3 if you ordered a soup and sandwich (33 per cent can't);
- Sign your name in the correct spot on a social insurance card (11 per cent can't);
- Circle the expiry date on a driver's licence (six per cent can't);
- Answer four questions about a meeting arrangement, including the date, time and people involved (between 15 and 17 per cent can't);
- Circle the long distance charges on a telephone bill (29 per cent can't).

These are the 10 items that a Southam literacy "jury" agreed every Canadian should be able to answer correctly just to get by in today's society.

The jury — drawn from across the country and from all walks of life — overwhelmingly chose these 10 as the most fundamental to daily life of the 38 items on one version of the Southam literacy test. In addition to the two dozen individuals named at the end of this article, literacy students in Saint John, N.B., also passed collective judgment and were counted as one vote.

Twenty of the 25 jurors agreed these items described a minimal level of functional literacy that they found acceptable. The jurors gave their opinions independently after looking at both the literacy questions and what answers counted as correct.

"Although we could have insisted that people get all 10 correct to be considered literate by the jury's standards, we decided to be more lenient," explains Dr. Paul Nesbitt of The Creative Research Group which supervised the survey.

"If you get three or more of those key 10 items wrong, then you're functionally illiterate; if you get only two wrong — that's only eight right — then you're marginal, but still literate," says Nesbitt.

Creative Research also assigned another cut-off point for anyone who got eight or more wrong out of the 10. They're called basic illiterates.

In the technical report by Creative Research, basic and functional illiterates are combined as "illiterates" and marginal and full literates are together called "literates".

In fact, the literacy jurors wanted a much higher level of minimal functional literacy, on average demanding 64 per cent correct out of the 38 items. This standard would have meant that 37 per cent of Canadian adults were functionally illiterate.

Asked about a "desirable" level of literacy, the jurors said Canadians should correctly answer all but a few of the 38 items.

Using the jury was a Canadian innovation in the "real-life" measurement of literacy, an approach pioneered in the United States in 1973 and since copied in Australia and Britain.

"We measure how well people read, write and handle numbers using examples from daily life, rather than slabs of schoolbook text," says Nesbitt.

Measuring literacy has always been controversial because no one agrees on the definition. Governments didn't start trying to come up with a uniform definition until after the Second World War, at least 5,000 years after reading and writing first appeared.

In 1948, a United Nations commission proposed "the ability to read and write a simple message" as a working definition of literacy. The UN and scores of experts have been trying to agree on a definition ever since, without

success. Conferences of the erudite International Reading Association degenerate into brawls when academics champion their favored definition.

About all they agree on is literacy isn't black-and-white, off-and-on, either-or.

Most experts reject the grade level approach to literacy used by Statistics Canada and UNESCO. According to their definition, anyone who completes eight years of schooling is automatically literate while anyone with less is automatically illiterate.

"It's just an administrative indicator," says Michael Collins, an adult education professor at the University of Saskatchewan.

"Go into a school and look. Grade 9 is no guarantee on its own that people can read and write." Research also reveals that reading skills evaporate if unused for lengthy periods; a Grade 9 education in the 1960s could have shrunk to a much lower reading level by today. Other studies have also found as much as a year's difference between the reading levels of Grade 9 students in different schools.

Literacy used to be more clear-cut in Canada. In 1861, the census of Upper and Lower Canada asked residents to mark a space if anyone in the household was unable to read or write. By that definition, scholars now estimate 10 per cent of Hamilton's population was illiterate, many of them Irish Catholic immigrants.

Today's equivalent might be circling the date on a driver's licence, which only 94 per cent of adults did correctly on the Southam survey (nearly 96 per cent if immigrants are excluded). "It's very, very rare to find people who can't read anything provided that they can see and can talk," says Frank Smith, a reading specialist of international stature who lives in Victoria, B.C.

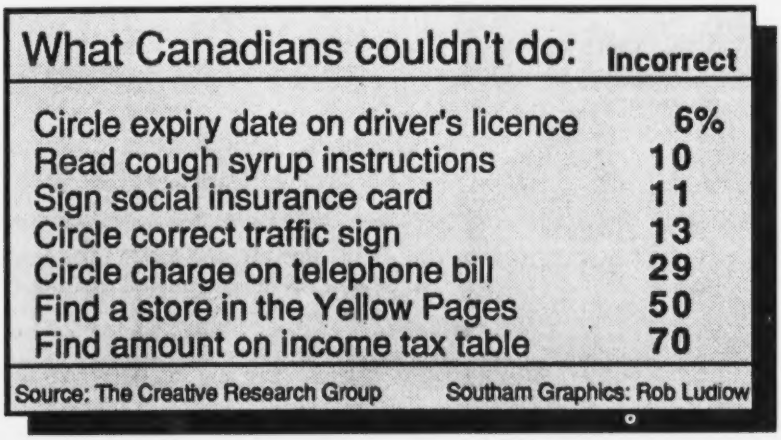
Yet the past century has brought compulsory universal education, higher expectations and a hodge-podge of specialized "literacies" — computer literacy, cultural literacy, humane literacy, geographical literacy, civic literacy, survival literacy, employment literacy, elective literacy, citizenship literacy, alliteracy and finally, numeracy — being literate about numbers.

"If you were really devious enough, you could come up with a definition that ensured that illiteracy doesn't exist," says an official of the council of ministers of education, the national body at which provincial ministers compare notes.

Several Third World countries have, in fact, proclaimed the eradication of illiteracy after mass campaigns. Within a few years, however, they were asking foreign aid donors for money for more literacy training.

"In four months time, everybody got a certificate because they could write their name and all of a sudden that's literacy," says James Draper, a professor of adult education in Toronto at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

In Canada and other industrialized countries,


What Canadians couldn't do:
Incorrect
Circle expiry date on driver's licence 6%
Read cough syrup instructions 10
Sign social insurance card 11
Circle correct traffic sign 13
Circle charge on telephone bill 29
Find a store in the Yellow Pages 50
Find amount on income tax table 70
Source: The Creative Research Group
Southam Graphics: Rob Ludlow

however, the debate has focused on "functional literacy," meaning the ability to effectively engage (or function) in the activities of the community.

But who decides if the functioning is effective? One faction says the individual. If people aren't bothered by their own low skills, then they're not functionally illiterate even if, like a Grade 12 graduate now in a Windsor literacy program, they must write down 2 + 2 in order to add to 4, instead of doing it in their heads.

But the majority view defines functional literacy as having the reading, writing and numbers skills necessary to perform tasks demanded by the community and, especially, by the job.

Some experts fear an overemphasis on functional tasks could shove fundamental reading and writing into the background.

One experienced literacy instructor in British Columbia complained that the tasks in the Southam survey were based on experience rather than competency.

"They reflect middle-class values and assumptions," wrote Cindy Onstad of Vancouver Community College.

Onstad agreed the task of calculating the ticket and transportation costs to an event was "a good choice." But "that becomes ridiculous when the event is the play *On the Town* and the place is Stratford." No objections to the survey questions were received from the jurors who worked in smelters, steelmills, on farms or as literacy co-ordinators. Literacy students at the Saint John Learning Exchange, however, said they would feel more comfortable calculating costs for a ball game than a play.

In its landmark 1985 study of Americans aged 21 to 25, the National Assessment of Education Progress went one step further, talking only about levels of literacy rather than use the term illiterate.

Literacy, said NAEP, is "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential." As expected, others disagreed and the debate rages on.

Southam's literacy jury included:

Margaret Atwood, author, Toronto;
Jim Bennett, vice-president, legislative affairs, Canadian Federation of Independent Business;
Harold Cardinal, native rights advocate, Enilda, Alta.;
Louise Coulombe-Joly, president, Quebec women's education group, AFEAS;
Thomas D'Aquino, president, Business Council on National Issues;
Rita Deverell, journalism professor, actress, Regina;
Ken Dryden, lawyer, former Ontario youth commissioner, Toronto;
Linda Forsythe, literacy co-ordinator, Vancouver;
Doug Gibson, book publisher, Toronto;
William D. Gilmour, forester, Port Alberni, B.C.;
Jean-Paul Hautecoeur, literacy consultant, Montreal;
Lorne MacIntyre, steelworker, Sydney, N.S.;
Charlie Mayrs, advertising executive, Vancouver;
Louise Miller, executive director, coalition of Quebec literacy groups;
Farley Mowat, author, Port Hope, Ont.;
Sheila O'Brien, oil industry executive, Calgary;
Raleigh Orr, disabled rights advocate, Truro, N.S.;
Ray Pegley, smelter worker, Kitimat, B.C.;
Marj Stefan, grain farmer, Limerick, Sask.;
Sami Tawfik, placement consultant, Ottawa;
Janet Turnbull, founder, Business Task Force on Literacy;
Marion Wells, literacy co-ordinator, Saint John, N.B.;
Bob White, president, Canadian Auto Workers;
Stan Wilson, cattleman, Nanton, Alta.;
Adult literacy students, Saint John Learning Exchange, N.B.

Profile of a typical illiterate

He's older, poorer and less educated, but doesn't blame poor reading or writing skills for holding him back.

You saw me today. I sat down beside you on the bus and borrowed the sports section. Or maybe it was at the corner store, when I picked up some milk on the way home from work.

I'm older than the rest of the guys around here, nearly 50, and didn't finish high school because my folks were hard up for money. We had a big family and Mom stayed home while Dad worked in construction.

Maybe someone read to me as a child, but I don't remember it now. There weren't many books in the house, anyhow, no typewriter or encyclopedia neither.

But Dad had the local paper delivered every day, just like I do now. I flip through the news and spend a lotta time on the horoscope and the sports. Can't stomach the funnies anymore, though. To figure out the comics today, you gotta care a lot more than I do about what's happening in government.

Let's check the listings and see what's on the tube tonight.

No... I don't watch THAT much. Two hours... well, probably closer to three... every night. It's a lot more enjoyable than reading.

That's a typical adult illiterate talking. Not a real individual, but a composite picture from 300 hours of personal interviews with more than 500 functional illiterates in the Southam Literacy Survey.

And it's not the usual portrait painted by community literacy groups and public agencies. They draw their image either from literacy students — amounting to fewer than two per cent of all illiterates — or from census statistics about people with less than Grade 9 schooling, the government's official definition of illiterate.

Instead, the Southam survey identified a true cross-section of real Canadians who can't read and write well enough to do many everyday tasks. And there were surprises:

- More men than women were identified as functional illiterates — 53.5 per cent to 46.5 per cent;
- More than half the 4.5 million illiterates said they went to high school and one-third claimed to have finished Grade 12;
- Eighty-six per cent of illiterates in the labor force had a full-time or part-time job over the past 12 months;
- Two-thirds of illiterates live in Ontario and Quebec, although the chances of being an illiterate are highest in Newfoundland;
- Only one in five illiterates blamed poor reading or writing skills for holding them back;
- As expected, illiterates are older — 30 per cent over 65 years old compared to 16 per cent of the general population. But otherwise they're just as likely as literate Canadians to be married or have children. And, despite feminist arguments, single parents don't jump out as more at risk.

Overall, illiterates emerge as operating in the mainstream society but not really part of it.

Independently of the Southam survey, literacy expert and author Richard Darville has concluded many illiterates lead "satisfying and effective lives." "The stereotype of the illiterate down-and-outers just doesn't hold," Darville declares in Vancouver. "They are good workers, loving parents, helpful friends and neighbors." But most literacy advocates, relying on official education statistics and literacy students, paint a far gloomier picture of the typical illiterate as female, unemployed, shut off from society and lurching from crisis to crisis.

"We almost have to prostitute ourselves in order to get funding. We have to talk about these 'poor people who can't get along at all.' But they're not skilless because they lack that one skill," literacy consultant Carman St. John Hunter admonished a Toronto literacy conference.

However, the lives of functional illiterates in Canada do differ from those of more literate Canadians.

They are poorer. The personal income of literates is 44 per cent more than that reported by illiterates.

The real gap is probably larger. Only two-thirds of illiterates answered the income questions, suggesting defensiveness about low earnings.

Because 30 per cent of all illiterates are retired, the income gap is greatest for those over 55, with literates reporting almost twice as much personal income. For the 18 to 34 age group, the gap narrows to 13 per cent.

Not surprisingly, this lower income level influences many aspects of an illiterate's life and helps explain:

- Lower attendance at movies, plays, concerts and sporting events with 56 per cent of illiterates saying they ever go compared to 85 per cent of literates;
- The dramatic difference in the percentages writing cheques at least once a month, 83 per cent of literates versus 44 per cent of illiterates:
- Low participation in clubs or organizations with nearly half of all illiterates saying they don't belong to any, contrasted to just over a third of literates who are non-joiners.

They're trapped in dead-end jobs. Fewer than half of illiterates who've ever worked said reading and writing were either extremely or very important for their jobs while three-quarters of literates did.

"They're trapped in a backwater of the employment jungle," says psychologist Dr. Paul Nesbitt.

"They don't see themselves as held back because often they don't appear to see the better jobs they might aspire to."

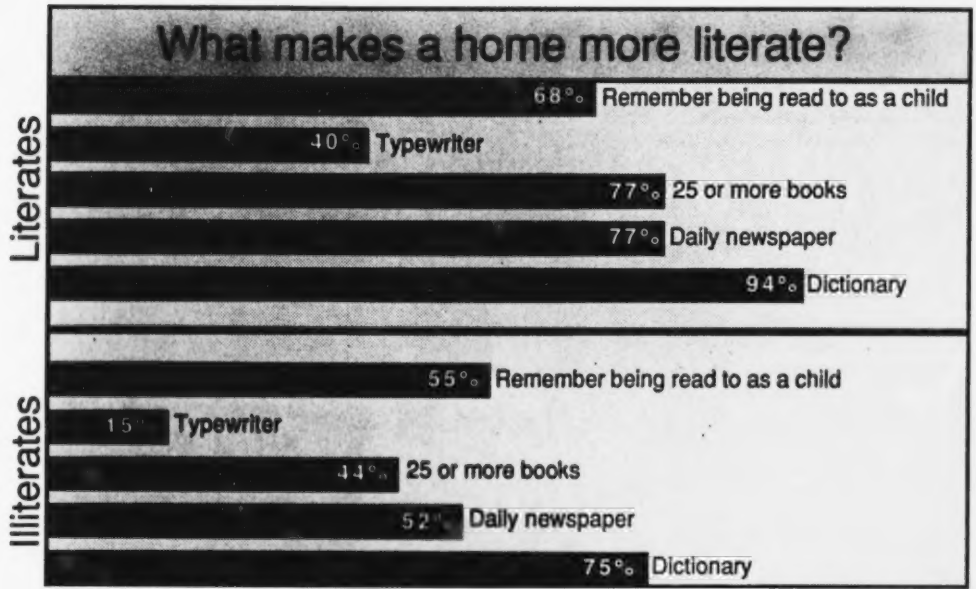
They read, but enjoy TV more. For the nation's 4.5 million functional illiterates, reading is a very hit-and-miss affair.

By their own admission, 54 per cent enjoy TV more than reading compared to 40 per cent for literates. And they watch 19 hours a week, three-and-a-half hours more than the average literate, with the biggest difference among the middle-aged.

Yet more than half — 52 per cent — claim to read a newspaper every day; 17 per cent say they never read a paper. However, the survey revealed these illiterate readers have a hard time understanding information in the paper.

While illiterates are only slightly less likely than literates to read a newspaper at least once a week — 87 per cent versus 95 per cent — they're much less likely to have read, or even looked at, a book over the past six months — 53 per cent versus 86 per cent.

And their book reading is different, with



Source: The Creative Research Group

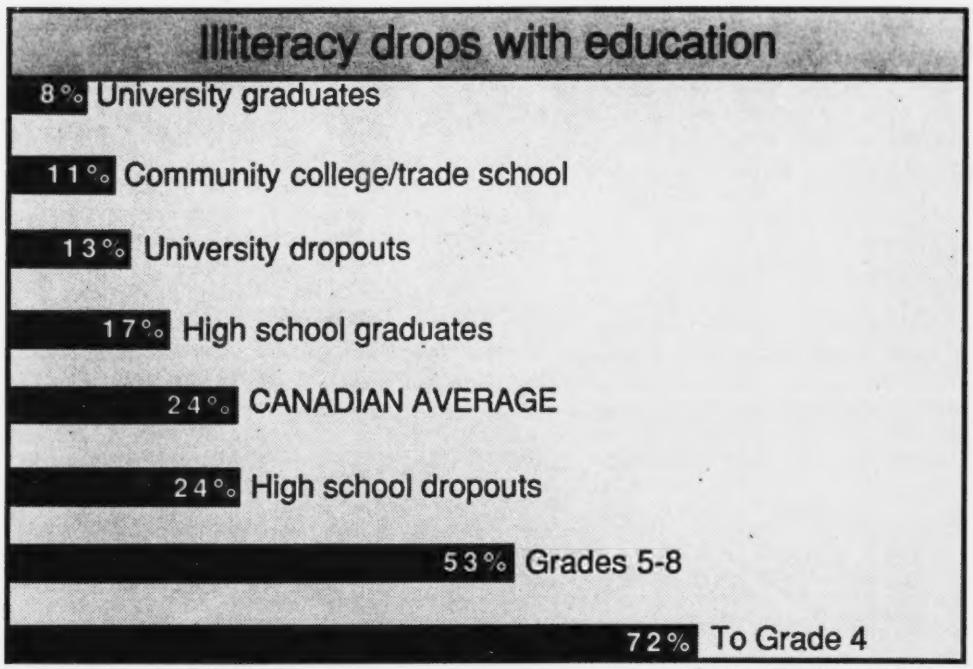
Southam Graphics: Rob Ludlow

more illiterates mentioning the Bible and religious tracts than literates. Literates are ahead in every other category but cookbooks which they read equally.

They need help but won't take classes. The stigma of illiteracy comes out clearly in two contradictory sets of answers.

Only one in five illiterates admits reading and writing are holding them back in their job or elsewhere and only 10 per cent said they might ever take remedial instruction to improve their skills.

But half later indicated they need help from family or friends in reading government notices, filling out a bank deposit slip, writing letters, reading instructions on a medicine bottle, finding a telephone number or reading product names in the store.



Source: The Creative Research Group

Southam Graphics: Rob Ludlow

Incident observed while picking up the mail

The elements have had their way with this man as with any other natural object.
The rain has left its mark on him as on the stone.
He looks down into the face of a boy about eight years old, a face so open to the world it reminds me of a cat whose claws have been clipped it is that vulnerable.
They wear bib overalls and rubber boots standing at a counter in this small-town post office and out of the corner of my eye I watch the boy sign the man's name to an unemployment insurance cheque.
He writes very slowly and with great care.
I am tempted to follow them across the street and into the bank so that I can see them smile at one another, lovingly, as the cashier examines the signature and finds it good.
Father and son — it would be impossible to decide which of them is prouder.

From ***I'm a stranger here myself*** by the late Alden Nowlan.

Onwards: the frustrations of being illiterate

I never read a book or a newspaper before this course. And just two weeks ago I bought a newspaper.

Wally, 30, St. John's

Newfoundland: highest illiteracy rate, least able to cope

"No," says Dr. Keith Winter, "I haven't ever actually met an illiterate. Not that I knew of, anyhow." A frank admission, but puzzling, since Winter has had plenty of opportunity.

First, he's the top official in the Newfoundland government's department that looks after adult literacy programs.

Second, the province has Canada's highest functional illiteracy rate, 44 per cent of all adults compared to 24 per cent nationally, according to the Southam survey. One in five Newfoundlanders is a basic illiterate, barely able to read and write.

On the island's west coast, the Bay St. George's Community College estimates 80 to 90 per cent in some villages are unable to adequately read and write.

Although it has the nation's worst literacy problem, Newfoundland spends the least — $340,000 in provincial funds or only $2 per illiterate a year.

In the late 1970s, Newfoundland was an innovator in literacy teaching, staging imaginative conferences at which government departments went on trial over unreadable publications and delegates had to find their way through a maze with signs in Chinese and Hindi.

Literacy classes then cost only $6 a term and nearly 300 were enrolled. By this year, fees were $35 and there were still only 300 spots.

Says deputy minister Winter: "The amount we can put into literacy is considerably less than we would like. Part of the salvation for our problem has to stem from getting more youngsters to stay longer in school." That salvation may be an illusion. A royal commission reported in 1986 that Newfoundland youth are on the way to becoming a "lost generation" because one in three can't find work even after graduating from high school or university.

The literacy survey discovered Newfoundlanders think today's education is much improved over grade school in the past. Getting at least a high school education is considered more important than anywhere else in Canada by a wide margin.

Wally knows the value of education. On every job application, he lists his Grade 11 certificate.

"I can't lie," he tells a visitor to an adult learning centre only 15 minutes drive from Dr. Winter's office in the Department of Career Development and Advanced Studies.

With his bright, blue eyes and an almost albino complexion, Wally, 30, reads at about the level of a Grade 5 pupil.

"I can read; I'm not stund," he says, using the Newfoundland contraction for stunned, meaning stupid.

"I was trying to read at the wrong level. I came here and they gave me some of the books at my level and I went right through them in an evening." Wally is lucky. His wife found the only adult basic education course in St. John's and he can afford both the fee and the time to attend four nights a week. Even though the course isn't widely advertised, the 40 spots fill quickly each term.

"We have to make it easier for people to come to literacy classes," says instructor Susan Hoddinott. "Make it available without charge and that would get all the people who are motivated." Motivation wasn't lacking for the delivery van driver who turned up at a literacy program: he couldn't read street signs.

He managed to deliver parcels by deliberately going past where he thought the street was, asking directions and then going past in the reverse direction, thus gradually zeroing in on the target.

"I sure uses up a lot of gas when I'm delivering," the driver chortles.

But there's little government help in the offing for many like him. The province has rejected a proposal by its own literacy experts to double funds for literacy programs and launch a publicity drive.

Instead, it will continue pouring money into training young Newfoundlanders for jobs someday in the Hibernia oil field.

"The No. 1 problem is that many people in charge don't see literacy as a problem. Even if they do, they don't know what to do about it,"

says Richard Fuchs, secretary of the provincial adult education association.

With no office, no paid staff and no telephone, the association is in a weak position to lobby the government for more literacy funding. Many members are government employees and afraid to speak out.

"What are we to do?" asks one such member.

"We're a poor province and we already spend all this money on education. It makes sense to talk about publicity and promotion when you see the size of our literacy problem. But none at all when you see the priority it's given."

Ownwords: the frustrations of being illiterate

I'd like to be able to read some of the books about asthma. My youngest has asthma and he gets real bad when the pulp mill is heavy. My husband got these books from the doctor but the words are too hard for me. I keep them on the shelf.

Susan, 26, Saint John, N.B.

Immigration boosts Canada's illiteracy rate

Immigrants make up a large percentage of Canada's illiterate population. Findings in the Southam Literacy Survey also cast doubt on the effectiveness of immigrant language courses given an estimated 100,000 immigrants this year.

Immigration is a mixed blessing for literacy in Canada.

The Southam survey discovered large-scale immigration accounts for about one million of Canada's 4.5 million adult functional illiterates. Thirty-five per cent of foreign-born residents in the survey were unable to handle everyday literacy tasks; this rises to 42 per cent when adults from the U.S. and British Isles are excluded.

But the grown-up children of these immigrants, born in Canada, score higher in literacy than longer-established Canadians.

In addition, the three-million-plus immigrants now living in Canada barely nudge the national illiteracy level upwards, from 22 per cent for native-born residents by themselves to 24 per cent overall.

However, other information strongly suggests the illiteracy rate has risen sharply among immigrants since 1980.

"Our findings suggest that the literacy problem associated with immigration eventually can work itself out. The message to government would be: get them young and get them into school," comments Dr. Paul Nesbitt, a psychologist with The Creative Research Group.

The survey also adds new fuel to a decades-old controversy about the effects of multiculturalism by taking a closer look at nearly 300 respondents who spoke more than one language as children.

Illiteracy is high among this multilingual group — 49 per cent for foreign born and 33 per cent for Canadian born.

These findings appear to clash with current educational theories that claim multilingualism at home and heritage languages at school improve literacy in both languages if carefully done.

"The data certainly suggests that multiculturalism and heritage languages are not a good thing automatically," says Nesbitt. "But it does not show what happens for children from literate, upper-middle-class homes who get sent off to heritage language classes."

Other findings:

- While immigrants are roughly one in five — 22 per cent — of all functional illiterates on a national scale, they account for roughly one-third of Ontario's illiterates and almost none of Quebec's. Immigrants are also a high percentage of Alberta's illiterates but the estimate of 38 per cent has large margins of error because of the small sample size;
- Any high school education dramatically reduces illiteracy among immigrants, as it also does for native-born Canadians. Yet 29 per cent of the foreign-born in the survey who claimed some university education actually tested as functionally illiterate, contrasted to six per cent of those Canadian-born;
- Schooling in Canada is much better for reducing illiteracy than schooling elsewhere;
- English spoken in the home or learned before starting school consistently produces higher literacy levels than French or all other languages. But this finding is colored by the high illiteracy rate among older French-Canadians and older immigrants.

Immigration also dramatically shifts the balance of illiteracy away from small towns and rural Canada and into the big urban centres.

Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver together are home to functional illiterates in about equal proportion to their 30-per-cent share of Canada's total population. But the three cities contain more than half of all immigrant illiterates.

By contrast, communities of less than 10,000 people account for one-quarter of the nation's population but contain 32 per cent of all native-born illiterates and only 10 per cent of the foreign-born.

The findings also cast renewed doubt on the effectiveness of immigrant language courses

given to an estimated 100,000 immigrants this year. Functional illiteracy runs at 50 per cent among foreign-born multilinguals in the Southam survey, whether they took some sort of language course or not.

The survey finding reinforces long-standing complaints by teachers of English as a Second Language. Across Canada, dedicated and frustrated teachers say they can't possibly produce any sort of literacy — and not much oral proficiency either — in the few months allowed for most immigrant language programs.

In 1984, the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment noted the longest provincially financed language course for immigrants lasted 30 weeks . . . while federal public servants spend 12 months on advanced bilingualism courses.

In Calgary, a Vietnamese group told the commission: "After four years of settlement, it is estimated that only about 20 per cent of Vietnamese-Canadian adults can communicate in some kind of English for everyday transactions." At most, five per cent could use English for work or further education.

Accurate national estimates don't exist for costs or numbers of immigrant language courses but the investment is huge — many times more than public spending on adult literacy for native-born Canadians.

The Department of Employment and Immigration, for instance, paid community colleges nearly $60 million in the 1986-87 fiscal year for language training to help 12,500 immigrants into the workforce. The Secretary of State gave $8 million to provincial governments to pay half the costs of language classes for 90,000 new citizens who aren't likely to enter the workforce, mostly women and older immigrants.

Immigration is also placing an extra burden on education costs. In 1987, the Toronto Board of Education expects to provide English-language classes for 30,000 immigrants — half of the total funded across Ontario. And the costs continue into college and university.

"I don't know what we're going to do with all the immigrants here; we can't give them a diploma and we can't abandon them," says Frank Daly, dean of English at Toronto's Seneca Community College.

"Some of them have had tremendous life experiences — look at the Vietnamese boat people who were attacked by pirates — but they can't read and write English and I'm not going to say they can." A federal discussion paper in 1983 hinted the provinces would have to pay more to make immigrant language training succeed. Second-language teachers say this hasn't happened, leaving too many immigrants trapped in a ghetto.

Far more encouraging is evidence that first-generation Canadians born of immigrant parents are academic over-achievers.

Only 18 per cent of these first-generation Canadians tested as functionally illiterate, well below the national average.

Studies from Ontario in the 1960s reached the same conclusion but more recent research suggests the children of the waves of later immigration are doing more poorly. The Nielsen task force pointed out that three-quarters of the immigrants in 1984 were admitted under "family" and "assisted relative" categories without any minimum standard for ability in English or French. Official Immigration Department statistics show 150,000 immigrants entered Canada between 1981 and 1986 who spoke neither official language.

"We're importing a big chunk of illiteracy," says Conservative MP Jim Hawkes who chairs the Commons committee on labor, employment and immigration.

"People who sign with their thumb prints come to Canada automatically as relatives but people with engineering degrees are being denied." The survey confirms high illiteracy among older immigrants. Nearly half of the immigrants who came here at 30 or older are functionally illiterate, double the rate among those who arrived 19 or younger.

Immigrants also appear to share the blind spot that native-born Canadians have about their literacy skills. Among functionally illiterate immigrants, 60 per cent said they weren't being held back in life by their reading and writing skills.

Among the 20 per cent who said they were being held back, more than half said they wouldn't consider taking remedial literacy instruction.

Bilingual Canadian more likely to be literate

Bilingual Canadians are only two-thirds as likely to be functionally illiterate as Canadians generally — 16 per cent as opposed to the national average of 24 per cent.

Anglophones appear to benefit more from bilingualism than francophones, with an illiteracy rate of only nine per cent compared to 23 percent for all English-speaking adults.

The illiteracy rate also plunged among bilingual francophones, from 29 per cent of all francophones to 20 per cent for bilingual ones.

But the apparent literacy advantages of bilingualism may really be linked to the higher education and socio-economic status of the 253 adults surveyed who said they regularly read newspapers, magazines or books in the other official language. More than half of bilingual Canadians went beyond high school compared to less than one-third of unilinguals.

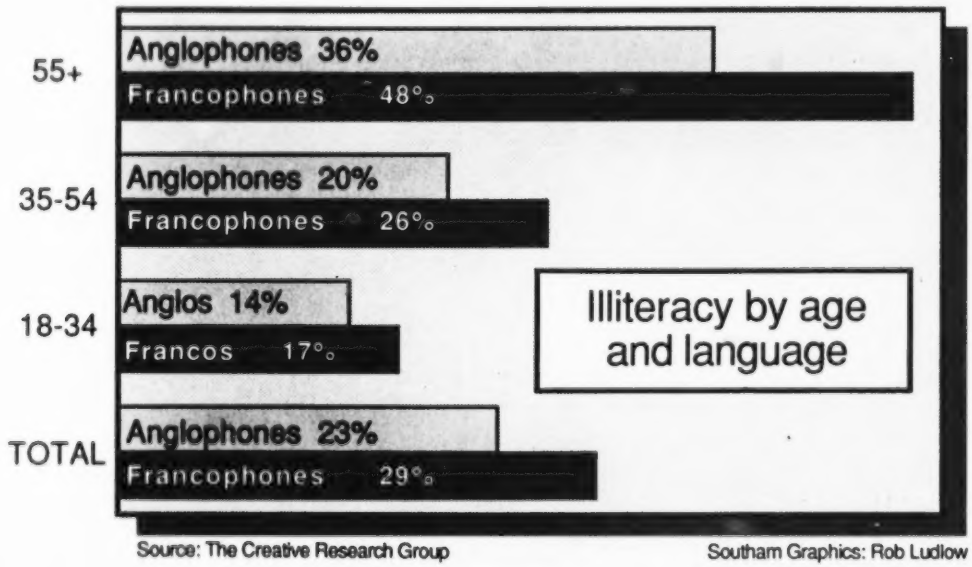
"This is a select group," says Dr. Paul Nesbitt of The Creative Research Group. "They're better educated, have higher incomes and are more literate generally." Nesbitt says the survey wasn't large enough in scope to examine the effect of language immersion classes on literacy. Some scholars have speculated recently that immersion may produce children with poor literacy in both official languages.

"You'd need a special study to answer those questions, comparing kids of the same socio-economic class who take immersion courses with those who don't." But the major federal agency funding such research has rejected a request to make Canada part of a 40-nation project studying many aspects of literacy in school children. An investigation of the effects of bilingualism was a key Canadian aspect of the $1-million proposal to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council by researcher Jeffrey Bulcock of Newfoundland's Memorial University.

"This would have been the first look at assessing French immersion on a national scale," Bulcock says. The council, relying on anonymous referees from the United States, rejected the request as premature.

In the 1986-87 school year, 200,000 children — or 4.3 percent of all students — enrolled in French immersion programs across Canada.

The Southam survey found 12 per cent of Canadians said they were bilingual enough to read material in the other official language at least monthly. (In the 1981 census, 15.3 per cent



Source: The Creative Research Group

Southam Graphics: Rob Ludlow

of Canadians said they were bilingual.) Interviewers also found francophones living outside Quebec — and anglophones inside Quebec — almost always chose to do the survey in the dominant language of their province. This meant francophones in the Prairies, for example, would be recorded as English speaking.

Across Canada, only six per cent of anglophones were bilingual readers contrasted to 30 per cent of francophones.

In 19 cases out of 20, the margin of error for a small sample such as bilingual Canadians could be as high as 4.5 percentage points.

Ownwords: the frustrations of being illiterate

You want to experience what illiteracy is like? Go into a restaurant and ask a waitress to read the menu to you. Go to the supermarket and ask for a particular brand when standing right next to the display. Go to any government office and say you can't fill out the form. Ask the phone company for a waiver on directory assistance charges because you can't read the phone book. That will give you some idea. But you can never feel the frustration, the anxiety.

Rick Parsons, former illiterate, Toronto.

Literacy programs need tremendous commitment and energy

Southam News national correspondent Peter Calamai spent two months in an adult literacy class at Ottawa's Parkway School to find out first hand who goes, why they go, and what they're feeling. Textbooks explain things like work attack skills and decoding. But they don't prepare an outsider for the tremendous energy that learner and teacher both must invest.

June 4

Adrianna sits right beside the teacher in Room 9 at Ottawa's Parkway School and that alone makes her stand out. But Adrianna is always working too, her face pressed close to a book or fist clenched tightly around a crawling pencil.

"I'm such a slow reader," she mutters after stumbling over a passage. "I have trouble saying the words . . . even after three days." All four adults this week began daily basic literacy classes lasting four hours every morning. In just eight weeks, teacher Donna Dowd will try to help them join the magic circle of readers. I will watch.

They all want to read. Sarah likes the newspaper's lifestyles section, especially "Dear Abby and the people who croak." Adrianna, the Bible. Lionel, a French-Canadian in his 20s, wants to read about animals while a middle-aged Lebanese woman will settle for "anything".

Textbooks explain things like word attack skills, language experience, decoding, story-telling. But they don't prepare an outsider for the tremendous energy that learner and teacher both must invest.

Donna begins the day with white cards, flashing words like city, switch, pitcher and admit — the "it" combination — and constantly encouraging the learners as they stumble:"Good, good . . . terrific, wonderful, very good, you've got it . . . don't go getting frustrated there." With lots more encouragement, Donna has the Lebanese woman dictate her experiences wallpapering a room, writing each simple sentence on an overhead projector.

June 8

The learners labor through the wallpapering story, now photocopied on sheets. I point out they skipped reading "The End." "We know where to stop," Sarah flashes. "We're not that stupid."

June 15

"Take Pride In What You Do," says the sign at the front of Room 9, dark blue letters stenciled on light blue paper.

It's someone else's story the learners read now, a moralistic tale of Sally and Jim who got married on little more than love. And the white flash cards are for "ay" — may, tray, stay, spray.

At coffee break, Adrianna hauls out a large jar of pickled peppers, yellow and red and pink and orange curls and wedges — beautiful enough for the Museum of Modern Art.

"You said you liked hot foods," she says, presenting it.

Carrying the jar, I bump into an agitated Joyce White, who runs Parkway School and other adult education projects for the Ottawa Board of Education.

"It's tearing me apart, but I'm going to have to combine some classes. Yours is one. Students drop out because they get jobs in the summer and we need an average of 10 to a class."

July 2

The Room 9 class has been split up. Adrianna and I have come to Room 3 where her cataract troubles again win the seat nearest the teacher. The six others in the class are 20 lessons ahead in spelling and stronger readers; they sail into a Canada Day story written by one of Parkway's celebrated authors, John Tourangeau, a learner himself: "Canada is still growing and one day everyone will wish they lived here. All Canadians are allowed to believe in which ever religion they prefer." Most stumble over "allowed" and "religion," including Adrianna. But even an outsider can see the progress in just

four weeks and sense the excitement. The magic circle of readers suddenly seems within reach for one struggling Jamaican woman.

"Yes, now I am hungry for words," she tells the teacher.

July 9

A new morning feature, a 15-minute discussion, brings forth news of a new baby niece, awards for the soap operas and views on the post office strike. The class is becoming more cohesive, not quite a family but much more than seven individuals.

Endlessly inventive, teacher Muriel Macnaughton brings in an 1877 cookbook with advice on carpet cleaning using a peck of Irish potatoes and two ounces of beef gall.

"You don't want to touch that gall," warns Adrianna. "When they cut open the cow, they throw that away right at first." Afterwards at an informal staff meeting, the teachers trade encouraging news. The Lebanese woman from Room 9, one says, was excited today because she had a book she could handle.

July 16

Parkway School visits the local newspaper, the *Ottawa Citizen*. From a gallery, two dozen learners watch the presses slowly revolve, gradually speed up to bursts of ringing bells and finally, print blurred on the rushing web of paper, spew out something they all still struggle to read. "So many words and so fast," says one.

July 23

Like an orchestra conductor, Muriel is directing the two sides of the table. "Stretch" says one to a hand signal. "Er" says the other. The conductor's hands meet in the middle and almost everyone manages "stretcher." Everybody manages to read "campanula" too, because Room 3 sharpens word attack skills on perennials from the Macnaughton garden, taped to sheets of paper. "The names are in Latin so we're all equal," says Muriel, glancing at the faded bell flowers.

July 29

Last day of classes until mid-September and Room 3 has a party, with home-made salami from one of the learners, home-grown tomatoes from another. A former learner drops by with a guitar to sing spirituals, one appropriately entitled "Learning to Live." As usual Adrianna is bustling, clearing, putting things away. "Do you know how old she is?" asks director Joyce White, "seventy-seven." Older than my mother and going back to school to learn to read. Writing in script for the first time after a life of printing. Waiting four months for an appointment to get new spectacles. Reading, always reading, and already anxious for the new semester to start in September.

"You had better come back here," Adrianna orders me, her mahogany face split with a wide grin.

Of course. I learned as much as they did.

Literacy students and teachers from Ottawa's Parkway School tour the composing room at the Ottawa Citizen.

Universities graduate functional illiterates

Can eight per cent of university graduates in Canada really be functionally illiterate? Unfortunately, that seems to be the sad truth — at least partly.

Can eight per cent of university graduates in Canada really be functionally illiterate? Yes and no, says Dr. Paul Nesbitt, supervisor of the Southam Literacy Survey.

"There really does seem to be a small number who get passed through university," Nesbitt says.

"There's a different skill needed to write a cheque — as asked on our test — and getting a passing grade from a professor."

Other factors:

- People being surveyed sometimes exaggerate when asked about their education levels, saying for instance that they graduated from university when in fact they flunked out, perhaps because of a campus literacy test;
- Illiteracy rises steadily with age, almost doubling among university graduates when comparing the youngest and oldest groups. In effect, once-adequate skills erode with time;
- Foreign-born residents who say they have university degrees are three times as likely to be functionally illiterate as those born in Canada. If foreign-born grads are excluded, the illiteracy rate among graduates — all Canadian-born — drops to five per cent.

Statistics aside, there's at least one flesh-and-blood Canadian university graduate currently getting instruction in a literacy program.

Now middle-aged, this man was born into a wealthy family, attended private schools and graduated from one of Canada's best-known universities.

Said one literacy worker who knows the man: "It wouldn't surprise me to discover that his family were big contributors to that university." At the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Prof. Mark Holmes says students who failed the English proficiency test at the University of Alberta a few years ago still managed to pass their courses.

"They were succeeding in university without being literate," he says. "I don't think universities should be putting illiterate graduates out on the market."

Cartoon by Dennis Pritchard, Saskatoon Star-Phoenix

Women more literate than men

Male egos take another battering in the war of the sexes. The Southam Literacy Survey shows women are more skilled readers.

To: All men
From: Peter Calamai, Southam News, Ottawa
Re: Latest claims of female superiority

It looks bad this time fellows. They've come out ahead again and it sure doesn't appear to be a fluke: women are more literate than men.

You probably know there are more women than men among Canadian adults — 51 per cent to 49 per cent.

Well, the Southam Literacy Survey says it's the reverse among functional illiterates — 53.5 per cent are men and 46.5 per cent women.

Don't stop reading. It gets worse.

Women outscored men on 40 of 61 literacy items on the survey AND they spent a minute less on average doing the test. Men did better on 14 items only and the sexes tied on seven.

"The differences aren't large but the pattern is too consistent to dismiss," says Dr. Paul Nesbitt, a psychologist with The Creative Research Group, which oversaw the face-to-face survey.

Nesbitt tries to soften the blow to male egos by pointing out that men are slightly better at working with numbers, as opposed to all other kinds of reading.

Big deal.

Here are some other individual items and the correct percentages for each sex.

	Males	Females
Read cough syrup instructions	87	92
Fill out cheque correctly	75	80
Follow route on city map	68	62
Summarize article on business words	45	50
Understand Charter of Rights	38	41
Find amount on income tax table	33	27

Had enough? Maybe it helps to know that men also did better reading traffic signs, understanding a newspaper editorial, using the Yellow Pages, deciphering bus and airline schedules and filling out job applications. Of course, an alternate interpretation would be that those were the few things women did worse at.

In the 35- to 44-year-old age group, men almost close the gender gap, with 82 per cent literate compared to 84 per cent of women. But among adults 18 to 24, women are 86 per cent literate while men manage only 80 per cent. Maybe young men have something else on their minds other than taking tests.

Other excuses: females always outperform males on verbal ability tests in schools. The experts say it's NOT differences in intelligence but environmental factors.

School certainly appealed more to the women in the Southam survey. Fifty-seven per cent said they had a Grade 12 degree or better compared to 54 per cent for men. Not surprisingly, women rate getting a high school education more highly than men, 63 per cent saying it's extremely important while only 55 per cent of men do.

And women score their own grade school education higher than men — 34 per cent say it was excellent while only 28 per cent of men thought so. Women are also marginally more likely to remember being read to as children and considerably more likely to think reading to children is extremely important, 61 per cent saying so as opposed to 45 per cent for men.

Giving a higher value to education holds up for literacy classes too. Among the few Canadian adults who admit they're been held back by poor reading or writing, women are more likely to say they might take remedial instruction, by 45 per cent to 35 per cent.

Not only do women score as more literate, they also lead more literate lives.

For example, the survey shows women go to public libraries 50 per cent more often than men, write 40 per cent more letters or notes and read more books. Eighty-three per cent of women surveyed said they read or looked at a book over the past six months compared to 73 per cent of men.

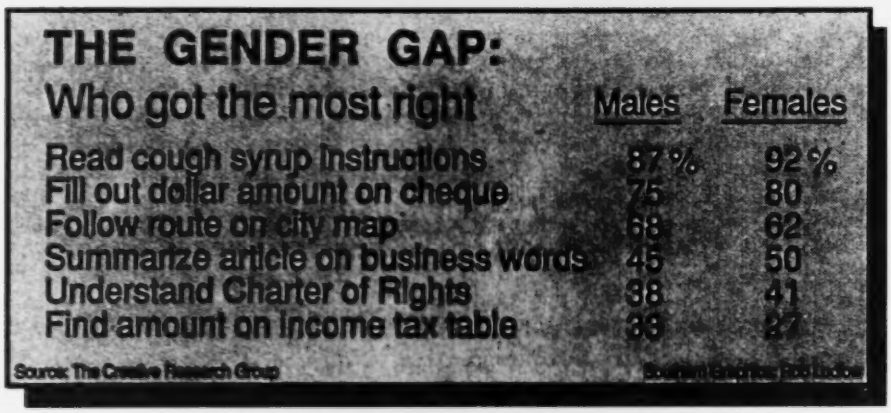
What kind of books? For women, cookbooks,

books, fiction and religious. For men, manuals, reference and science. Women also reported spending more than six hours each week reading books, an hour-and-a-half more than men.

Blame weekend TV, probably sports. Over the whole week, the sexes are almost even in the amount of television they admit watching, roughly 16.5 hours. But on weekends, men seem to boast about spending nearly a third more time in front of the tube.

It's all laid bare in relative attitudes toward reading and watching television. Fifty-four per cent of men say TV is more enjoyable while only 32 per cent of women do. And among the middle-aged, the difference is doubled.

Say, while your wife is reading that book, why not just hide this?



Onwards: the frustrations of being illiterate

I bought a couple of poetry books even when I couldn't read. I like the deepness in poetry. I'd like to understand the depth that the poet has given . . . to get the glory out of his meanings.

Joan, 63, Vancouver

National cost of illiteracy incalculable

Putting a national cost on illiteracy seems to be the equivalent of calculating the incalculable. But there's a huge economic and social cost and business, government and society are paying it.

How much is illiteracy costing Canada? Pick a number, any number.

There's the $2-billion-a-year figure foisted on the unwary by literacy advocates who divide 10 into a pie-in-the-sky U.S. estimate of $20 billion.

Or there's the cautious conclusion of a study for the Secretary of State that "under-education (or illiteracy) does have an economic cost." Finally, there's the finding of the Southam Literacy Survey that functional illiterates are twice as likely as literate adults to be long-term unemployed.

While some definite figures exist showing the benefits of literacy to individuals, putting a nationwide cost on illiteracy seems to be the equivalent of calculating the incalculable.

But that's just what the Business Task Force on Literacy figures must be done to spur government action.

"The bean-counters run the world today," says task force president Paul Jones, "and we're not well equipped to talk to them in their terms." Yet some beans have already been counted and numbers crunched in an unpublished Secretary of State study by Ottawa consulting economist Monica Townson and in 40 pages of mind-boggling statistical tables from the Remedial Reading Centre, a private school in Toronto that specializes in helping people with dyslexia and other learning disabilities.

The centre recorded every cost and each benefit linked to 24 adults with moderate to severe reading and writing problems who received one-to-one tutoring there between 1979 and 1984.

Thirteen were on some form of government assistance, seven were working poor and four were being supported by their families. Two had brain damage, two were physically handicapped and the other 20 had learning disabilities, sometimes with additional physical problems.

Yet of the 23 who could be later traced, only two remained on unemployment insurance; 13 had jobs and the rest were full-time students aiming at specific jobs. Results are even better now, says the centre.

Overall, the Ontario provincial government got back its payments for training in only three-and-a-half years through income and sales taxes from former jobless illiterates now working. The investment by the federal government, though a half-share of the training costs, yields a 25-per-cent annual return to the Gross National Product from the new wages.

"The teaching does pay," insists centre director Abner Steinberg.

"If you put up $20,000 to provide literacy to someone and retrain him, it's a lot less expensive than paying $6,000 a year for the rest of his life." Economist Townson takes a far broader view in her study of the costs of illiteracy. She calculates the extra income that theoretically might be earned if all three million-plus adults with less than Grade 9 schooling were suddenly being paid the same average wage as workers with some high school education.

The $7.4-billion estimate of lost income "must be treated with extreme caution," Townson warns, since upgrading education won't automatically produce higher income.

That sort of simplistic assumption, in fact, draws Townson's fire when applied to prisoners and welfare recipients who also happen to be illiterate.

Higher literacy would cut the cost of running penitentiaries, notes the 24-page study, only if some illiterate inmates wouldn't be in prison if they were literate — which isn't proven.

And while an Ontario study decides, on slim evidence, that probably half of the province's welfare recipients are illiterate, Townson says the crucial unanswered question is whether they're on welfare because they are illiterate.

"Without a clearer understanding of the linkages between illiteracy and other social problems or concerns, it may well be impossible to arrive at a reasonably accurate estimate of the

economic costs of illiteracy." Estimates aside, Louise Miller, head of the umbrella group representing Quebec's community literacy programs, notes: "When there are economic problems, the illiterates are at the back of the line." On an individual basis, however, some retail firms already know they're paying a surcharge for poor reading, writing and numbers skills among their employees.

Toronto consultant Susan O'Dell says her firm is often asked to investigate apparently missing supplies. "One of the reasons can be that people really can't read and are misplacing boxes. They work by rote and if anything changes, they can't cope." Yet most retailers place illiteracy far down on their list of problems, way below the "vanishing" work ethic, punctuality and honesty.

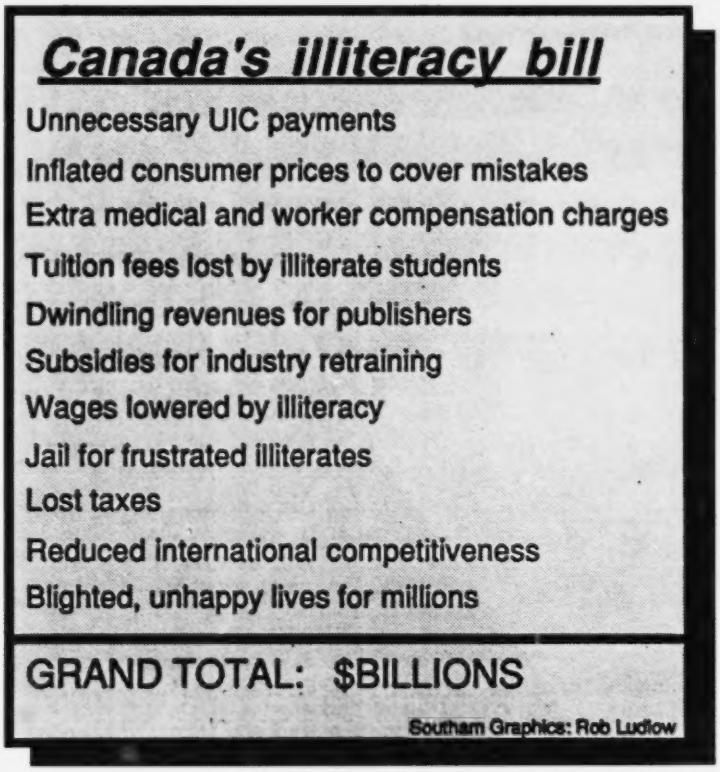
They cope with poor literacy by "dumbing down" the task, as fast food outlets have with cash registers using symbols to illustrate each possible sale.

However, for some manufacturing firms, poor literacy — including mathematics — has to be faced head-on.

In the automotive industry, for example, there's a race to introduce Statistical Process Control (SPC), a quality-tracking technique invented by two U.S. scientists but taken up first by Japanese car builders.

SPC requires higher reading and math skills from assembly line workers and, the industry told a federal task force in 1985, "a sizable minority are suffering from inadequate literacy and mathematical abilities." Among the biggest independent auto parts manufacturers, 29 per cent reported "often inadequate" reading and writing skills in the existing workforce while 21 per cent said the same for newly hired workers.

The Ford Motor Company now requires a Grade 12 certificate for all new employees, even for unskilled jobs. Yet formal training costs for the automotive industry are still forecast to rocket from the current $75 million a year to


Canada's illiteracy bill
Unnecessary UIC payments
Inflated consumer prices to cover mistakes
Extra medical and worker compensation charges
Tuition fees lost by illiterate students
Dwindling revenues for publishers
Subsidies for industry retraining
Wages lowered by illiteracy
Jail for frustrated illiterates
Lost taxes
Reduced international competitiveness
Blighted, unhappy lives for millions
GRAND TOTAL: $BILLIONS
Southam Graphics: Rob Ludlow

$200 million, discounting inflation. Some of this is making up for poor literacy.

In at least one area of training, evidence of illiteracy has been available for years and quietly overlooked, or suppressed.

Internal studies by the federal employment ministry four years ago pinpointed poor academic skills as the primary reason why one in five drops out before finishing federally funded training programs in community colleges.

In 1983, such dropouts cost taxpayers $170 million, according to employment officials.

Low literacy also exacts a toll from trade unions. Some union leaders say the inability of the rank-and-file to understand contracts can make bargaining tougher and increase the chance of illegal walkouts. And one union blamed poor reading skills among blue-collar workers for the disappointing results of a political education campaign six years ago.

Even the federal public service — often considered an elite workforce — suffers. One agency nearly missed the deadline for a crucial report because the stockroom hadn't ordered essential printing supplies. A senior official discovered none of the stockroom workers could read at a high school level.

Economists concede they can't possibly estimate the myriad of small costs imposed by illiteracy: gas wasted because delivery drivers can't read street signs, house gutters installed upside down by illiterate handymen, misdirected mail, misunderstood instructions, chemicals improperly mixed at a factory, airplanes not serviced correctly . . . the potential list is endless.

Yet the biggest cost of illiteracy may not be from government or unions or industry but from the straitened lives of millions of functional illiterates — an image that leaps out from the Southam survey.

As Senator Joyce Fairbairn, who launched Parliament's only literacy debate so far, says: "The internal emotional loss for individuals, the stress, the wreck it makes of their lives — and particularly the lives of their children — is really a cost that I don't think any country can afford."

Frontier College photo

Woman comparing Raid and PAM, both in yellow-and-red aerosol cans with red caps, illustrates one of many potential dangers to people who can't read.

Sweat by day, teach by night: heritage of Frontier College

For 85 summers, Frontier College has marshalled young men on university campuses and marched them away in steel-toed boots and hard hats to lumber camps, remote construction sites, mines and — the ultimate Canadian romance — railway gangs. They work by day and teach by night.

Like hundreds of thousands of men before him, Mike Finigan is counting the swings of his 10-pound sledge-hammer. About 4,500 should be enough today, banging in anchors to hold steel rails to new wooden ties.

And like thousands before him, Finigan is also thinking about helping his 50 fellow railway workers improve their lives and education later that afternoon, when the heat of the prairie sun near Suffield, Alta. has distorted rails that disappear into an endless horizon of azure sky and golden earth.

Finigan is a Frontier College laborer-teacher, once the pioneer of literacy-in-the-workplace in Canada. But now laborer-teachers are even more of an endangered species than the "navvies" on CPR's Alberta No. 1 Tie Gang.

For 85 summers, the college has marshalled young men on university campuses and marched them away in steel-toed boots, overalls and hard hats to lumber camps, remote construction sites, mines and — the ultimate Canadian romance — railway gangs. They work by day and teach by night.

Norman Bethune moved on to doctoring in China after experience as a laborer-teacher; James Mutchmor to be moderator of the United Church; Svend Robinson, David Kilgour, John

Public Archives photo.

Frontier College laborer-teacher Canadianizing immigrant workers in 1912.

Photo by Frank Webber Jr., Medicine Hat News

Mike Finigan, a Frontier College laborer-teacher, battles illiteracy on the CPR line, near Suffield, Alberta.

Crosbie — all to the current Parliament; and someone from London, Ont. named David Peterson, who nailed spikes for $1.35 an hour.

"On the first day I smashed a finger," the Ontario premier recalls. "It bled and I was in a boxcar with 12 older guys who were all drunk. I never wanted my mother more than that night. Why am I doing this?, I kept asking myself." For one answer, listen to Alfred Fitzpatrick, founder of Frontier College, writing in 1920 about the laborer-teacher: "He is in the highest sense a nation-builder . . . They are the teachers of the frontiers. They are the high priests of the broadening culture of our times." But this year, there almost weren't any teachers in overalls. Disorganization at the college, indifference at the CNR and suspicion at the railway union meant only seven laborer-teachers sallied forth, five to the CPR in Alberta and B.C., one on an Ontario rail gang and the seventh to a hydroelectric site in northern Manitoba.

"There's still a need today — we had a study done in Northern Ontario — but we've got to decide if laborer-teachers are a priority, with all the other things we've got going on," says John Daniel O'Leary, Frontier's director of development.

Translation: the college can more easily raise money to help high school dropouts and factory workers than for Newfies, East Indians, or natives. Even Premier Peterson, who wound up enjoying his stint, talks about laborer-teachers as "a dying breed." Don't use those words with Brent Boulton who worked 12-hour days on the B.C. Steel Gang this summer.

"I gave a short English lesson to an East Indian my first day on the job. By August, I was tutoring four and had another fellow enrolled in the Open Learning Institute. It's my second summer here and the men know me and accept me," says the 24-year-old philosophy student.

Out for the first time, Mike Finigan found the going slower.

"It takes time," he says one June morning. "You just can't run in and say: 'Hey, I'm here to shove English down your throats.' It takes time." By mid-August, however, Alberta No. 1 Tie Gang had accepted both the 23-year-old

Cape Bretoner and his talents with a baseball glove or a Gordon Lightfoot ballad. Plus the Frontier College stuff, of course.

"I've applied to university for a couple of fellows and to a correspondence course for another," Finigan says over the telephone. "The library is set up and the guys have swapped their own books for most of the ones I brought." And don't say it to Gregory Koostachin, a 47-year-old Cree in the isolated community of Attawapiskat on the west shore of James Bay. In 1965, he travelled to Elliot Lake in Ontario's mining belt where Frontier's laborer-teachers gave a group literacy program.

Says Koostachin: "That's where I learned to read more and study. I wanted to learn mathematics so I could run a small business. I was No. 1 in the mathematics and now I have a big business, running the hardware store here." Ian Morrison was Koostachin's tutor two decades ago. Now he is executive director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education.

"It changed my whole life," says Morrison. "These were real people with real problems and I enjoyed that combination. But there's always been a tension between two values in the laborer-teacher program. Is it a kind of formation program for these elite students or is it a service to people?"Or is it social pacification, far cheaper than riot squads? Edmund Bradwin, who tutored in work camps for 10 years and later ran Frontier College, warned in 1914:"Men sit nightly in such camps reading with avidity . . . pamphlets and circulars cooked to inflame, not tempered with saneness. Only the influences closest at hand must determine whether there is evolved a Lincoln or a Lenin." Frontier's current president, Jack Pierpoint, chuckles at the quotation. Bradwin and Fitzpatrick adjusted their message for raising funds, he says, and Red-baiting was big stuff at the time.

"The Depression work camps are the part that bothers me most about the college's history. I think the college was used to implement a government policy . . . the laborer-teachers were put in to keep out the Commie organizers." Now the laborer-teachers are hardly being put in anywhere, although the college still trumpets the history in fund-raising campaigns. Yet a great need remains, says Doug Bell, a former laborer-teacher who salvaged this summer's effort.

"We got an unsolicited petition signed by every member of one CPR tie gang saying there should be a laborer-teacher on every gang in Western Canada." Back on the Alberta No. 1 Tie Gang, a man named Terry briefly rests his sledge-hammer and talks about going back to school after being away 11 years. He's saving from his $10-an-hour job to try law school.

Looking especially satisfied, Mike Finigan bangs the 2,567th anchor of the day.

Better literacy skills crucial to Canadian workforce

Canadian society must more and more rely on its wits instead of big biceps. That's a grim fact for two million illiterate employees who will be hard hit by the future need for greater analytical and communications skills in most workplaces.

Two million workers across Canada are trapped in a tightening vice between their own illiteracy and a relentless rise in job demands for reading, writing and using numbers.

The Southam Literacy Survey confirms that illiterate workers — one out of six in the labor force — will be hard hit by the need for greater analytical and communications skills in most industries.

New types of jobs will make much greater literacy demands than before, government and industry studies predict, and existing jobs are being transformed by technologies like numerical control. Dairies are installing personal computers on the shop floor and the cabs of future tractor-trailer rigs will feature continuous printouts on vehicle wear and tear.

"The ability to learn will be the premium skill of the future," declared the Economic Council of Canada in a 1987 jobs study.

But only one in four of the nation's two million working illiterates think they need help with reading and writing on the job. Fewer than 10 per cent say they're even likely to take remedial instruction.

"It's a gloomy picture for programs trying to tackle literacy in the workplace," says Dr. Paul Nesbitt, a psychologist with The Creative Research Group.

The survey identified 24 per cent of adult Canadians whose literacy skills are too limited to handle simple day-to-day reading, writing and use of numbers. Nearly a third of these functional illiterates are retired; of those looking for work, 86 per cent had some sort of job in the past 12 months.

Occupations volunteered by the illiterates roughly mirror the pattern for the Canadian workforce. This means illiterates aren't concentrated in industries that might be sheltered from the projected onslaught of learning on the job.

Twice as many illiterates as literates told the survey interviewers that reading and writing aren't now important in their jobs. But other studies have found 40 per cent of Canadian workers expect their jobs to be altered by technology over the next five years.

The survey's gloom is borne out by the start-up troubles in the summer of 1987 of the first national workplace literacy program, being introduced in three regions by Laubach Literacy under a $1.2-million federal grant over three years.

Literacy in the workplace usually means one employee helping another in basic reading, writing or mathematics, with the tutoring preferably done half on their own time and half on the company's. Learning materials often come from the workplace — shop manuals, office forms or a machinist's shift report.

The three projects based in Sydney, N.S., St. Catharines, Ont., and Winnipeg, Man., originally struggled to reach an initial target of 20 students. One recurring problem is a backlash by management and workers to the very word "literacy".

"If only they had some other name for the program," says Bob Ruttan, general manager of a dairy in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

The dairy is enthusiastically participating in the Laubach workplace project, initially by providing tutors rather than students. The introduction of a personal computer on the assembly line — so machine operators can monitor their efficiency — might spur employees to take courses.

"We claim that better reading and writing skills are going to improve the productivity of employees. But we don't know it for a fact," says Peter Sawyer, who co-ordinates the projects from Laubach's national office in Saint John, N.B.

Some studies suggest improving reading skills may boost productivity no more than 10 to 15 per cent. Researchers at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ont., will monitor the success

of the on-the-job approach by Laubach, a U.S. offshoot that claims 5,000 volunteer literacy tutors in Canada.

The program in the Niagara Peninsula has a foot in the door at about 35 firms, says local co-ordinator Diane Young, who was shocked when several companies bluntly said they didn't care about illiteracy among their employees.

"The manager of a meat-packing outfit said, 'My employees don't need to read and write, they just need to cut meat.' Another came right out and said they wanted to keep their employees stupid or else they'd leave for better jobs," Young says.

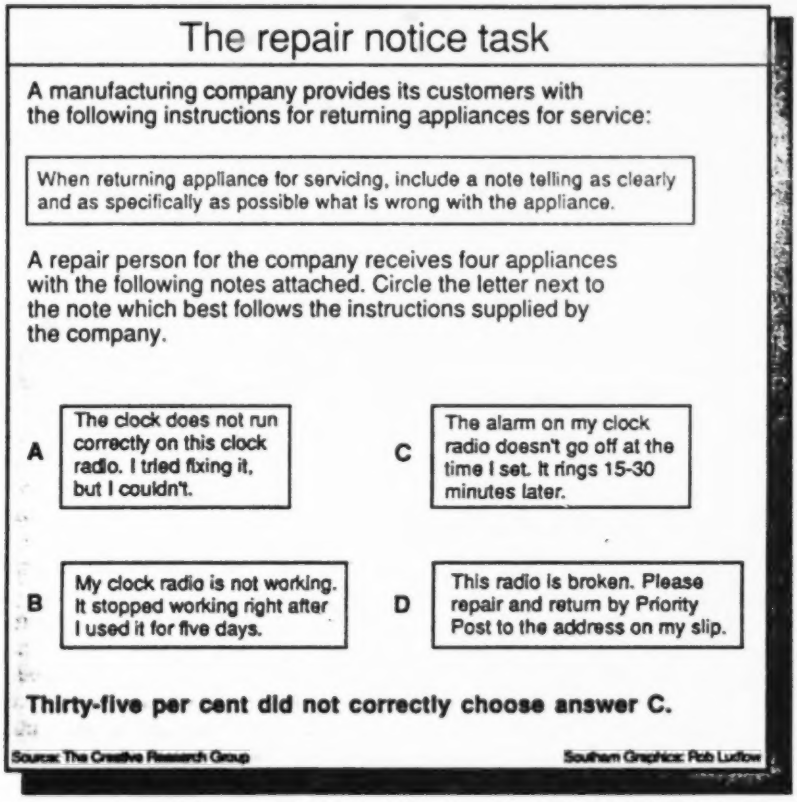
In Winnipeg, Laubach had problems getting started in the garment industry and at the giant health resources centre, where Portuguese-speaking cleaning staff threatened a co-worker who offered tutoring. Officials suspect culture and poverty played a big role in both instances.

A sensitive approach is also important to Toronto's Frontier College, about to launch its own on-the-job literacy projects with federal grants similar to Laubach's.

"We're not going to call it the Acme Screw and Gear Literacy Program," says college president Jack Pierpoint. "We'll call it the AS and G Management Upgrading Program." Unions also have concerns about workplace literacy, fearing companies might use illiteracy as an excuse for firing an employee who asks for help.

Some literacy advocates oppose in principle tying tutoring so closely to the job.

"You can train a person to be a mere cog," says Ruth Baldwin, president of World Literacy of Canada. "Or you can train him so he can have a number of skills, show initiative and take responsibility." Many of these issues have already been wrestled to the ground in the U.S., which is several years ahead of Canada with active programs at major corporations such as


The repair notice task
A manufacturing company provides its customers with the following instructions for returning appliances for service:
When returning appliance for servicing, include a note telling as clearly and as specifically as possible what is wrong with the appliance.
A repair person for the company receives four appliances with the following notes attached. Circle the letter next to the note which best follows the instructions supplied by the company.
A
The clock does not run correctly on this clock radio. I tried fixing it, but I couldn't.
B
My clock radio is not working. It stopped working right after I used it for five days.
C
The alarm on my clock radio doesn't go off at the time I set. It rings 15-30 minutes later.
D
This radio is broken. Please repair and return by Priority Post to the address on my slip.
Thirty-five per cent did not correctly choose answer C.
Source: The Creative Research Group
Southam Graphics: Rob Ludlow

General Motors, Xerox and Polaroid. Research has convinced these companies that blue-collar workers are now reading an average of 97 minutes daily on the job.

"Often it was three minutes here, two minutes there — forms, directions or a memo that showed where you had to drive a forklift truck to pick up something," says Larry Mikulecky, an Indiana University education professor who studies assembly lines and convenience stores to discover "real world" literacy demands.

Those demands, Mikulecky has found, mostly fall between the 9th and 12th Grade in reading difficulty. But 15 per cent of the time, they're higher.

Most of Canada's working illiterates can't handle even the simple materials, the Southam survey shows. For example, roughly one in five workers picked the wrong explanation in the survey when asked to explain why a clock-radio was being returned for repairs.

Yet hiring new workers isn't possible for most industries; an existing workforce that's just entering middle age and a dip in new entrants means about 85 per cent of Canadians working today will still be working by the year 2000.

"Employers can't fire all the workers because they're old-fashioned and hire new ones, because the turnover wouldn't be there with our demographics," says Judith Maxwell, chairman of the Economic Council of Canada.

Maxwell says studies show Canadian workers are flexible and employers can be forward-looking. They'll have to be. Between 1971 and 1981, technological change cut employment for workers with less than Grade 9 education by 15 per cent and by eight per cent for high school dropouts.

Computer projections by the council show the change accelerating, with job opportunities slashed in scores of occupations and new types of jobs created.

Says Maxwell: "We're becoming a society that has to live by its wits more than by its strong backs." Or as Alfred Fitzpatrick, founder of Frontier College, wrote nearly 70 years ago, when urging industry to provide 40 minutes a day for literacy lessons: "The results should prove remunerative to the company as well as to the men."

Getting nowhere fast: one worker's experience

An assembly line worker in his early 30s, James forces himself to commute 50 km twice a week to literacy classes run by the London Board of Education because there are none at his auto plant. As he tells Peter Calamai, James senses that without help, his inability to write will leave him stalled on a long road to oblivion.

I've been at Ford 18 years and for the first eight years, it was a challenge to learn the job. It is a semi-skilled job and my goal was to reach the top of that skill. I think I've achieved that.

But I realized I was going nowhere fast and I had to evaluate myself fairly. I felt that I had speaking skills but there were no education skills. I never passed a grade in my life. I was always put up, goofed off, got out of school as soon as I could, at 15. I spent two years at an occupational class at high school and then out I went.

Materialistically, I've done very well, I own a nice home, two vehicles. I have a nice wife, two kids who are highly motivated.

I'm a highly motivated person, I like to achieve. And my hands are wearing out — 15 years on that line — it's time to use my brains. And in order to capitalize on it, I've got to learn to spell.

It was hard to sit down and realize that you can't write, that these skills are holding you back. That was very difficult. The next difficult thing was to do something about it. So you make a few phone calls, you find out what can be done and then . . . it's getting to the point where you had to humble yourself. I've been here a year now.

I got off work this morning at four o'clock. I got back up at quarter to eight to come to class and drove here from Aylmer. I'll go home now and I'll go to work at three o'clock and I'll work to twelve. It's not enough class time for me. By the time I get my Grade 12, it may be a five- to seven-year project, because of the limited amount of time I'm able to put into it, raising a family, working at a job.

So many people in our society do not reach out and grab their full potential. To do that takes motivation. It also takes a tremendous wife, tremendous kids, friends. As you go through life, everybody needs strokes. When you're illiterate, you take those strokes and you hang on to them as long as you can, because there will be a lot of bats coming at you.

It's a cage, you live in a cage and once in a while you take risks and if you get slapped down, you go back in the cage and lock that real good and tight. I realize that and I take risks and I do get burned sometimes but I have to take these risks. Because every risk I take, if I succeed, it gives me confidence to go on to another.

There are opportunities out there that are just tremendous right now. Management is changing their ways of thinking. They're getting more people involved on the line with the process of building a car. If you have anything up there (pointing to his head), they'll give you an opportunity to utilize it. But along with that opportunity, you have to have some skills. Communication skills are the future, being able to talk to people, getting people to be productive.

Once I have these writing skills, I'll sit in a room and I'll listen to this guy talk, this guy, this guy and I'll pick up every one of his interesting points. I'll jot them all down and I'll go home and I'll roll them all over in my mind. I'll come back to the next meeting and I'll give them my opinion.

The only reason that I know that most of these guys I work with can't write — most of them can read — is that I know my own skills in trying to avoid that and I watch them do the same. It's getting to the point where we can't hide it anymore.

If Ford Motor Company said to me: 'We've done a statistical study and we think that 60 per cent of the people out here are illiterate. You take your lunch hour and we'll give you another half-hour along with it to come in and get tutoring.' I'd take advantage of that.

And it matters how they do it. If they come out and say, We've got to be more productive. We're going to help you people to be more productive.' Even if the union did it on its own, just the union, that wouldn't work, that

wouldn't work to the extent that the company would do it.

You know, it's a hell of a thing to expose yourself like that, it really is. I'm nervous doing it; it's a risk. But somebody has to talk for people who are in that situation. This is the type of guy I am . . . you give me the opportunity to get my Grade 12 behind me, I'll go out on the street and campaign for people who couldn't write, because I understand their problem.

All it takes is one person to stand up, it takes one person. First you have to provide for yourself and your family and then you can help people like that.

You could do wonders for a lot of people.

Onwards: the frustrations of being illiterate

No one knows the anger that people who can't read go through. You can't pick up a paper and learn the latest news. You can't carry on a conversation because you don't know what's going on in the world. You're left in the dark. You just try to carry on the best you can. We're living in a different world than other people who can read.

Ron, literacy learner, Ottawa.

LITERACY vs literacy: conflict in approach

With the fervor of religious crusaders, literacy advocates champion their own approaches. For some, reading and writing take second place to changing society.

In a pin-neat kitchen at the back of a turquoise-trimmed clapboard house, Charlotte Piercey and Ray Felix discuss Ellen Bell's eggs.

"The eggs are fresh. They are very fresh. Ms. Bell sells many fresh eggs. She sells twelve fresh eggs for seventy cents." Felix reads confidently as Piercey moves her finger along the words. He's 35 and left school after Grade 5 to work in a fish plant. She's the clerk of this town nestled at the foggy end of the Burin Peninsula.

Together they're engaged in literacy.

In a sweltering, untidy room on the top floor of a skid row community centre in Vancouver, Linda Forsythe and 21 others discuss the price of coffee, the exploitation of Indians and the inalienable rights of students.

They're engaged in LITERACY.

"Our job here is empowerment," says Forsythe. "We have to get these people to take charge." In between — geographically and ideologically — at a community centre in Scarborough, Ont., nine volunteer literacy tutors listen with some trepidation as Joy Evans of Frontier College suggests they try both literacy and LITERACY.

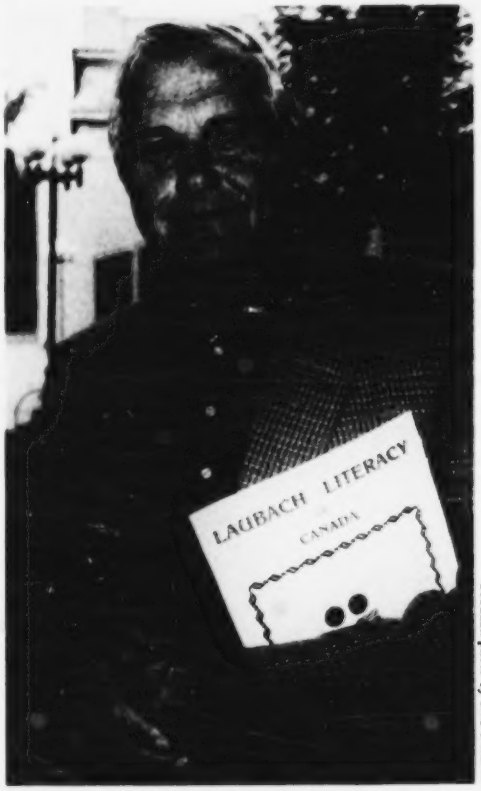
"Tutors are not obligated to get involved with their students in terms of advocacy, but the students do have a lot of needs," Evans says.

These three vignettes give a glimpse of the issue which most divides Canada's literacy groups — whether to teach literacy as an end in itself or as a means to other ends. Much of the constant squabbling among literacy groups arises from this fundamental disagreement over purpose.

Evelyn Murialdo calls it the difference between little-l literacy and big-L LITERACY.

"I relate Literacy as knowing, understanding, living and learning," she says at the Toronto offices of the International Council for Adult Education.

"I don't want to teach literacy to someone, teach them how to read and write, without touching their lives, without picking out with them the things they need to learn in order to have a place in this society. I don't want to do that." Now listen to Luke Batdorf, president of Laubach Literacy of Canada: "They (the big-L advocates) see the illiterate person as an underdog, so of course they're in a hurry. They see literacy only as a tool for social justice or equal rights. I think that's very patronizing."



Southam photo by Rob Ludlow

Luke Batdorf, president of Laubach Literacy of Canada.

Batdorf's agitated tone also conveys some of the annoyance that Laubach feels over constant attacks on its teaching materials, such as the story of Ellen Bell's eggs.

"Laubach is so boring," says one literacy

with a community project.

"The books don't afford any meaningful feedback to the student. You get to the end of the page and what have you learned?"From the empowerment camp, that's one of the gentler criticisms of Laubach. Like warring religious factions, the groups assail one another's doctrine, dogma and paternity. Often the illiterates seeking help appear to be sacrificed to the ideological battle.

Other issues also split the naturally fractious literacy groups: paid teachers versus volunteer tutors, community versus national and using phonics or a whole language approach.

"Oh, dear," sighs Audrey Thomas at her home in Victoria, B.C. "I tried to lay that ghost to rest in my report." Thomas's report, published in 1983 by Canada's committee for UNESCO, was the most comprehensive look at literacy in Canada. It concluded that "no single, highly specialized method secured superior results" in teaching illiterates.

More recently, research at the University of Calgary's Reading and Language Centre came to the same conclusion after directly comparing the Laubach approach with another that avoids phonics as much as possible.

"I would never argue that one is better," says centre director Grace Malichy. "For the vast majority of illiterates, a variety of approaches will work almost equally well. But for some we must identify the correct approach." In Edmonton, Mary Norton says the correct approach begins not with the choice of technique but with involving the whole community so literacy programs will survive the uncertainty of government funding.

"We need to build a strong base so that we have a long-term plan rather than a quick fix," says Norton, who headed a province-wide study of literacy services.

The paid teachers versus local volunteers debate is equally divisive.

Teachers see potential new jobs in the literacy field as enrolment in regular schools continues to dwindle, but governments are attracted by the cost-savings of using volunteers.

"When bureaucrats say that volunteers are OK for adult literacy, I think it's a class thing," says Serge Wagner, a University of Quebec literacy expert.

"Those same bureaucrats couldn't dare say that volunteers should be responsible for teaching their children to read and write." They might if they could see the calibre of volunteer that Toronto's Frontier College attracts.

Two men and seven women, most in their 30s, are almost quivering with anticipation at an orientation session in early July.

The patter is fast and verging on evangelical: "People call me and ask what do you have to do to be a tutor. They say they've never taught, they've never been to college. And this is what I tell them," Joy Evans is saying:"Believe the person can learn." Two months later, eight of the nine have believed enough to be tutoring illiterate students in their homes during the evenings.

Says Frontier's president Jack Pierpoint: "We're not in the business of organizing revolutions. We're in the business of providing basic education and we're pretty good at that." In Victoria, Audrey Thomas points out that simple, small-l literacy is empowerment enough for many illiterates. "They don't want to lead a revolution — they just want to be part of the mainstream."

Federal record on literacy: opportunities wasted, warnings ignored

The federal government's record on literacy is a series of opportunities wasted, warnings ignored and political pettiness displayed by both Liberal and Conservative administrations.

The latest addition to this doleful litany was $1 million in "development" funds for literacy announced in early September, all that Secretary of State David Crombie was able to salvage from an initial multi-million dollar request to the federal cabinet in spring, 1987.

Crombie concedes he's struggling to get some sort of permanent federal commitment to literacy in place before the existing public interest falls off.

"We've got to capture the interest and make sure it's going to continue. We want to be here for the long haul." Literacy groups can be forgiven for being skeptical; they've heard such promises before, starting with the 1971 report of a Senate committee on poverty that recommended a national office to set educational goals for the country. The same idea was repeated in 1985 by the Macdonald Royal Commission, a good indication of how little progress has been made.

Numerous other warnings have also been ignored by federal authorities: a 1976 report by the Senate finance committee; a 1979 commission of inquiry for the federal labor minister; a 1984 royal commission on employment equality; a 1984 task force report to the employment minister; and a 1986 Senate report on youth.

"Adult illiteracy in Canada is a serious social and economic problem which is being largely ignored," prophetically warned the 1979 inquiry.

The current federal government has also ignored the Conservative party's own blueprint for combating adult literacy, drawn up three-and-a-half years ago by a task force on manpower retraining appointed by then Opposition leader Brian Mulroney.

The Tory task force recommended a federal-provincial conference "for the sole purpose of developing an action plan to combat adult illiteracy." Also recommended was a public advocacy campaign about illiteracy and immediate work on developing teaching materials for volunteer tutors. No action was taken on either proposal.

Inside the federal bureaucracy, a few officials have waged an isolated and increasingly demoralized struggle to get more attention paid to the growing illiteracy problem.

"It should be readily apparent that the federal government of Canada's direct contribution to literacy education is no more than a pittance," said an internal report in December, 1984, from the training branch of the Employment and Immigration Department.

And a shrinking pittance. The only federal training program that provided upgrading for people with reading and writing skills below a high school level was deliberately cut back by officials and politicians — because it was too popular.

The program, known as Basic Training for Skills Development, helped more than 55,000 functional illiterates in 1972-73. By 1984-85, the total number of trainees had been slashed to 29,000 and recent administrative changes effectively bar the majority of functional illiterates.

Why? Because Ottawa wasn't going to pay for cleaning up mistakes made by the provinces.

"The BTSD component appears to be directed at meeting worker needs which have resulted from deficiencies in provincial educational programs," intoned the Nielsen Task Force in March, 1985.

Senators had trotted out the same line in 1975 when they grilled the late Bob Andras, then Liberal manpower minister, about which level of government was responsible for under-educated adults.

"The fact is that they do exist," Andras shot back. "Whether it is their fault or the fault of the educational system does not enter into it. They are now on our doorstep." But the federal government has even ducked illiteracy when its jurisdictional authority was undisputed. Decades of inadequate schooling for Indians have contributed to soaring illiteracy rates among natives.

In 1982, the Economic Council of Canada

noted in astonishment that Ottawa had axed much-needed adult education programs on Indian reserves.

Language training for immigrants also falls far short of functional literacy, according to numerous studies.

Yet the federal bungling extends beyond the political pettiness and ignored warnings. Ottawa also managed to abandon the most successful adult literacy approach ever developed in the country.

The BLADE program, for Basic Literacy for Adult Development, was part of an ambitious series of pilot projects in the early 1970s run by NewStart corporations in six provinces. It was one of the first do-it-yourself literacy courses in the world, employing custom-made cassette tapes and Canadian-content books.

But when the sponsoring NewStart corporations reached their scheduled end after five years, federal officials were deaf to pleas that BLADE be salvaged and further refined.

"They just weren't willing to get into a fight with the provinces over who should be responsible for literacy," says Luke Batdorf, who worked on the NewStart program and is now president of Laubach Literacy of Canada.

"And they still aren't. They have historical amnesia." Functional illiterates are right under the noses of parliamentarians.

Senator Joyce Fairbairn was polishing a speech on literacy in March, 1987, when a passing Senate messenger unexpectedly volunteered that many of his co-workers were eagerly anticipating her remarks.

A somewhat surprised Fairbairn, legislative aide to Pierre Trudeau for 15 years, managed to reply that their attention to illiterates was "interesting".

Said the messenger: "Because some of us are, you know."

Ownwords: the frustrations of being illiterate

It's like a shadow, it's always with you.

Lorne Gibson, literacy learner, Maple Ridge, B.C.

Government publications often so dense they're unintelligible

That's bad news for parents if there's a change to family allowance benefits. But it's also bad news for politicians if voters can't understand propaganda explaining why the government wants to change a policy.

Most government publications can't be easily read or understood by the average Canadian.

The result, say literacy experts, is that many Canadians aren't warned about dangers such as workplace hazards and can't benefit from government programs they're entitled to.

York University education professor Gary Bunch tested more than 30 publications for "readability" using two standard formulas. The publications were selected at random from pamphlets and booklets issued to the public by Ontario, B.C., Newfoundland and the federal government.

Nearly half of the material required university-level education to read, although two-thirds of Canadian adults never got beyond high school. A mere four publications rated as readable by someone with only Grade 8 education — the level of 3.7 million adults.

The results indicate little change since a 1970 task force condemned the "sheer unintelligibility" of most federal publications.

Official surveys in the late '70s and '80s also gave a failing grade to provincial health and safety publications.

"It's not maliciousness; it's ignorance," says Bunch.

"I'd guess that the people who write these don't even talk to a factory worker or someone who hasn't had a solid basic education." While some experts criticize readability formula as misleading, Bunch's findings are supported by the Southam Literacy Survey. One-quarter of all 2,398 adults interviewed said they need help reading publications from governments and business and four out of 10 functional illiterates volunteered they had difficulty.

Even among fully literate Canadians, more than one in five reported needing help with such written materials.

Income tax tables are the toughest. Seven out of 10 Canadians couldn't use the tax chart to pick the right amount of federal taxes to pay on taxable income of $13,990.

Little has been done in Canada to make government materials more readable — a sharp contrast to other western nations. The federal government has focused on research rather than reform.

For five years, the Legal Services Society in Vancouver has produced citizen's guides to the law that are easily read. But both the guides and the approach have been slow to catch on in Canada.

"It's a huge fight to try to get some people to understand that the world isn't filled with print junkies all with PhDs," says Carol Pfeifer, the society's director of public legal education.

A survey of how small claims courts are explained showed improvement in the readability of pamphlets, says Pfeifer. But too often the material was written from the viewpoint of the legal system rather than for the person who needed the information.

"The people who most often need the advice often can't understand the publications," agrees Bill Shallow, a Newfoundland government expert in adult education.

As U.S. President Jimmy Carter said in 1978, when he ordered American government regulations written in Plain English: "The federal government has become like a foreign country, complete with its own interests and its own language." These judgments are borne out by the York University survey that found many essential pieces of information are written well over the heads of the intended audience.

A federal pamphlet on how to apply for a Social Insurance Number, for instance, rated at a senior high school or university reading level. So did five pamphlets by the B.C. ministry of human resources explaining benefits and rights.

By contrast, the Ontario minister of justice tried to explain divorce and separation to children by writing at the Grade 8 or 9 level and another Ontario pamphlet aimed at babysitters

managed Grade 7 prose.

"A lot of care was taken with the writing of these. You can see the difference," says Bunch.

The York professor used two formulas, named after their inventors Fry and Dale-Chall, to determine a range for the reading level. The formulas look at such things as sentence length, numbers of syllables per word and the familiarity of words. Short sentences and short words always score best.

Worst among the publications was the federal government's free trade promotion kit, a glossy collection of fact and fiction that flooded supermarkets in May, 1987, as part of a $12-million advertising campaign.

By checking random 100-word blocks, Bunch rated the main booklet, "Securing Canada's Future," and four other inserts from the 200,000 kits. All came out at between second- and fourth-year university level.

"It's as if they weren't talking to the ordinary people, but only to the uppermost slice — politicians, business leaders and editors." Yet the federal government once knew how to write for ordinary Canadians about an urgent national issue.

In 1931, a 30-page pamphlet from the Department of Pensions and National Health tried to calm fears about a terrible disease called Infantile Paralysis, later known as polio. It managed this technical subject with prose no higher than a Grade 7 reading level.

"If they could do it 50 years ago, you'd think there would be more of it today. Anything important can be written so that people with only basic information can understand it. Once they managed with simplicity and grace. Now they have to dazzle us with their complexity," complains Bunch.

The reading barriers created by big words, jargon and wandering sentences aren't limited to government publications. Other surveys have found most trade union newspapers are too difficult for their intended readers, staff manuals baffle retail workers and even materials for adult literacy students lack consistency.

Readability of government publications

Document	Years of school required to read
Federal	
1931 polio pamphlet	5-7
1987 free trade publicity kit	13-17
How to look for a job	5-6
How to apply for Social Insurance Number	13-17+
National Defence recruiting pamphlet	13-17+
Family Allowance inserts	10-12
British Columbia	
Information on workers' rights, benefits	13-15
Newfoundland	
Nutrition and farm pamphlets	13-15
Ontario	
Workers' Compensation Board guide	16-17+
Legal advice for layman	7-9
Senior citizen's guide	11-12
Babysitters' pamphlet	7-8
Drug abuse information	9-10

Source: Prof. Gary Bunch, York University — Southam Graphics: Rob Ludlow

And newspapers, popular magazines and school textbooks are constantly being surveyed to see if they're shooting wide of their readers.

The whole mess is further complicated by continuing controversy over the readability formulas themselves. Supporters concede that the formulas don't distinguish between sense and nonsense, take no account of graphics or typography and can't know whether the intended audience has special knowledge.

"I might have a motorcycle repair manual which tests out as first-year university level. Yet if I gave it to someone who reads at the Grade 9 level but also happens to maintain his own motorcycle, he'd manage with no problems," says Andrew Manning, an education professor at Halifax's Mount Saint Vincent University.

In 1980 under a federal Justice Department contract, Manning did the most comprehensive readability survey yet in Canada — 300,000 words, three formulas and 59 documents from the federal government, eight provincial governments and the Reader's Digest.

All the documents attempted to explain some aspect of the law to the public. Manning's conclusion: only a half-dozen would be useful to the people who most needed the information.

"It's not malice; it's egocentric writing by lawyers who never consider who the intended audience is." One U.S. expert isn't so positive that poor readability is an accident.

Michael Fox, director of a Washington,

Photo by John Dowson, York University.

York University education professor Gary Bunch shows a student how he does his word count and readability assessment.

D.C., literacy group, says the dense prose of many official forms is one way of making sure that too many people don't apply for benefits.

"It's OK to rewrite computer manuals, it's OK to have a Plain English law for well-off people to understand their mortgages, but when I want the food stamp applications written more simply, I'm accused of wanting to 'dummy down' things," says Fox.

In Canada, the experts don't like Fox's theories but they haven't got any better explanations for the lack of official action.

Despite pages of suggested changes in Manning's 1980 study, few of the unreadable legal publications have been revised. And Ontario, which discovered in 1985 that most health and safety material couldn't be read by workers, still hands out many of the same unintelligible pamphlets. The ministry of citizenship and culture, however, last year issued a Plain English guide to government services for immigrants.

Mostly, when governments do try, the attempts appear half-hearted.

Ruth Baldwin, a Plain English consultant based in Ottawa, advised a group of federal officials who prepare sheets inserted with family allowance cheques. It took six months to reduce a change-of-address form from two pages to one, says Baldwin.

"I don't think those people were really convinced about what they were doing; they haven't had us back," she says.

They should. The readability survey rated three family allowance inserts at Grade 10 to 12 reading levels, higher than the education of at least five million Canadians.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *York University's Gary Bunch was asked to rate this article by Peter Calamai. Using the Fry and Dale-Chall standards, it was marked as between a Grade 11 and first-year university level.*

Plain language crusade can save government money

A 76-year-old retired accountant with aching legs is Canada's crusader for Plain English. Single-handedly over the past 20 months, Cy Whiteley and his scuttling pen have revised 1,100 forms and leaflets from 39 federal departments and agencies.

Cy Whiteley's pen scuttles furiously down the government form, slashing legalisms and turning gobbledegook into plain English.

"Affix your signature," Whiteley mutters. "Why not just, sign." "Do you have any absences from Canada?," he reads. "An ordinary person would ask, 'Have you been away from Canada', but not these pseudo-lawyers." By now Whiteley is in full fury; his unrelenting pen decorates the once-neat page with accusing arrows, blackened blocks and caustic comments. The revised document is sent back to the federal government agency that inflicted it on the public.

Another blow for official prose that can be easily understood.

Britain has Plain English overseers in the prime minister's office, Australia a special cabinet adviser on Plain English and the United States a federal Plain English regulation signed 10 years ago by Jimmy Carter.

Canada has a 76-year-old retired accountant with aching legs whose hobbies used to be brisk walks and writing letters to the editor under seven pseudonyms (six male, one female).

But the local newspaper only prints a few of his many letters and various ailments have given a rest to the pedometer on Whiteley's belt. Instead, Yoda-like, he instructs Plain English novices from an anonymous corridor of empty government offices just a few blocks from the Parliament Buildings.

"I've been niggling at people for years," he grins. "It's a thing you grow up with." Some niggling. Single-handedly over the past 20 months, Cy Whiteley and his scuttling pen have

Photo by Jack Schiderman, Ottawa Citizen

Clear-writing crusader Cy Whiteley, 76, sits among a mountain of government publications.

revised 1,100 forms and leaflets from 39 departments and agencies.

"He's a dedicated critic and his comments were very valuable," says Dale Colter of the federal customs service.

Those valuable comments — or at least half of them — account for scores of pending changes to "I Declare", the million-copies-a-year customs brochure telling Canadians what they can legally bring home from trips outside the country.

Whiteley's work is a project of the Law Reform Commission, which hopes to expand to French-language forms as well. It started almost as a fluke when the retired accountant was hired to fill a temporary financial vacancy and a commissioner discovered Whiteley's private crusade for plain language.

"The greatest number of all Canadians should be able to understand, with minimal help, all government forms and instructions," he explains.

Uncredited improvements from the plain language project are already in citizenship forms from the Secretary of State and creeping into documents from a half-dozen other agencies as existing supplies are used up.

"They can't grasp that it would save money to chuck out a few hundred pounds of old forms and print new ones right away that save the public's time and government expense as well. That's why it's slow starting." Experience elsewhere shows the value of plain language in government forms. By revising the application forms for legal aid, one British agency cut $2.5 million a year from staff costs of dealing with faulty applications. The U.S. Federal Communications Commission rewrote the regulations for citizen's band radio into plain language . . . and was able to reassign five officials who had done nothing but answer questions about the previous legalese.

MPs are also in favor. A Commons committee last year urged immediate and drastic simplification of income tax forms, which six million Canadians pay others to fill out for them.

"Look at this," says Whiteley, retrieving an Australian income tax form written in Plain English. "They've even made the type large enough for old people like me to read." Small type is one target of Whiteley's avenging pen. Another is document writers who forget the large proportion of immigrants and semi-literates in the general public. The "dedicated critic" even revises forms while waiting at the bank or reading fire notices in his apartment building.

But some Canadian government officials aren't convinced of the need for plain language. One agency said it might consider improving the illegible type in a notice — when existing supplies are used up in 10 years.

Whiteley won't identify other foot-draggers. But many who apply for a passport are puzzled by the form's convoluted phrases and jargon.

And there's always Canada's post office, dependably backward in its customs sticker which demands a full description of contents and then intones: "Non-observance of this condition may lead to a delay of the item." The U.S. postal service manages with: "Failure to do so might delay your article."

The Gobbledegook Detector

Short words and short phrases are more readable than multisyllabic monstrosities. Cy Whiteley's guide to stamping out pompous prose.

Are you baffled and annoyed by pompous prose and ponderous bureaucratese? Working for the Law Reform Commission, Plain English crusader Cy Whiteley devised a rule to rate readability and root out flabby writing.

To analyse a passage that might consist of a sentence, a paragraph or more than one paragraph, count every word and write the number in the square box.

Count the sentences and write the number on the line below "Sentence." Divide the number of words by the number of sentences and write the average number of words per sentence in the space at the left.

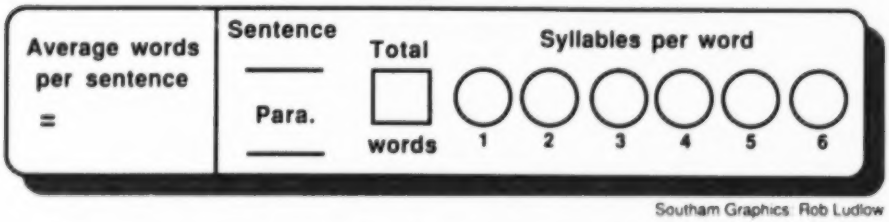
If a piece being studied includes several paragraphs, put the number on the "Para" line.

If the text has three sentences that total 180 words, for an average of 60 words per sentence, it's unsatisfactory. Connecticut's Plain English Law insists the average number of words per sentence be 22 or less and no sentence exceed 50 words.

Now analyse each word by the number of syllables it has and enter the number of words in the proper circle. Count "ed" suffixes as syllables, even when they are not pronounced separately.

The more words that appear in circles to the right of Circle 2, the more pompous the writing tends to be.

In general, short words in short sentences that express clear thoughts are much more readable than multisyllabic monstrosities expressing meandering musings.



Southam Graphics Rob Ludlow

Ownwords: the frustrations of being illiterate

Being illiterate is like trying to pick something up with both hands tied behind your back.

Wendy Stevens, literacy teacher, Saint John, N.B.

Prison inmates insist "carrot-and-stick" programs don't work

The "carrot-and-stick" prison literacy campaign promoted by Solicitor General James Kelleher is doomed to failure, say the hardened men who are the supposed beneficiaries. The "carrot" has its moments. But the "stick" isn't going to budge lifers who landed in jail because they wouldn't follow society's rules.

Wally Belczowski is still talking calmly about the benefits of education as the door made of grey steel bars scrapes shut a foot from his face. His voice becomes suddenly urgent.

"It matters." There is a loud click. "It really matters." And then Wally, head of the students' council, walks back into Edmonton Institution, an S-6 maximum security federal penitentiary, complete with Special Handling Unit.

A tough jail for tough men. Usually about half of the 190 inmates are lifers.

Ten of these inmates have just spent the better part of a summer morning telling a visitor why the "carrot-and-stick" prison literacy campaign being pushed by federal Solicitor General James Kelleher will fail.

"The carrot sometimes works," says Wally, whose formal title is chairman of the distance education group. "The stick doesn't work at all.

"If we were going to do what we were told, we wouldn't be here. If you tell someone here they have to learn, they'll break your nose, or worse." The coercion in Kelleher's policy comes from giving less of everything to allegedly illiterate inmates who won't take remedial courses: less pay, less chance for early parole and no chance for privileges like day release.

That's only the start. Senior department staff don't hide their admiration for the success of some U.S. prisons with mandatory literacy courses.

"We're not convinced yet that we need to go the U.S. route," says assistant corrections commissioner Andrew Graham. "You hold things in reserve." In a remarkable display of masochism, Kelleher even hosted a national conference in Ottawa in May, 1987, where experts from across the country competed to trash the coercive slant of the policy.

From B.C.'s Simon Fraser University, Prof. Stephen Duguid questioned the basic assumption behind the literacy drive — that education will empty jails by rehabilitating prisoners.

"We've been down this road before," warned Duguid, who runs the country's most successful program of university studies inside penitentiaries.

Other critics said little was being done for the 4,000 former federal inmates on parole. Provincial jails, with another 12,000 inmates, are even farther behind.

But no inmates, federal or provincial, were invited to that ballroom at the Chateau Laurier.

"Just because I'm in prison doesn't give them the right to push me around," Rob Ironchild is saying. Other inmates in an Edmonton Max classroom nod in agreement. Bill joins in: "They don't want us smarter than them, they don't want us to get any smarter in this place." The penitentiary system insists it does want the inmates smarter — at least about society's rules.

"We're trying to teach inmates that they're responsible for their own behavior," says Dan Kane, head of offender programs. "We want them to take control of the world they live in, in a positive way." That's called "life skills". Two years ago, the professionals of the Correctional Service of Canada urged a 10-times increase in spending on life skills and only a doubling for literacy courses.

Politically, literacy is a lot more salable for ambitious ministers than nebulous "life skills".

"We solicitors general don't seem to last long," Kelleher notes. "I'm the fourth one in two-and-a-half years, so I'm trying to get a lot done rapidly." So far, he seems to be succeeding. In the first three months of the new drive, the correctional service graduated almost twice as many newly literate inmates as in the past 12 months — 252 versus 150. The numbers don't really mean much. As Kane told the National Conference on Offender Literacy: "We can make the books look like we want them to." Part

Correctional Services Canada photo.

Inmates at Collin's Bay Institution in Kingston, Ontario, learn to use computers.

of the problem is the correctional service has only the vaguest idea what proportion of the 12,000 federal inmates are really functional illiterates. The SCAT (School and College Ability Test) being used to rate prisoners is more than 20 years old, was designed to measure the progress of California teenagers, was overtaken by a new version six years ago, and, since it is multiple choice, rates as literate a prisoner who can barely sign his name.

Worse still, the test's shortcomings mean the correctional services don't actually know if 252 inmates have really jumped from reading below a completed Grade 8 level to reading Grade 9 or above — the government's cutoff for illiteracy.

Using SCAT to evaluate inmates before and after literacy training is "inevitably going to give an illusion of improvement," concludes an unpublished critique by an expert in educational testing.

Recently, the correctional service admitted these problems by asking a Carleton University adult literacy expert to find a better test, fast.

Back at Edmonton Max, the distance education group ran its own evaluation among the inmates not in segregation using another California test.

"We only found 12 per cent below Grade 5," says Wally.

That means 14 prisoners who are basic illiterates, with profound limits on their reading and writing skills. Education officials at the prison estimate two or three dozen more are functionally illiterate. Yet only nine inmates enrolled in the basic literacy course.

The solution, says Marshall Hopkins, is tutoring by other inmates.

"If the goal is to overcome illiteracy in prison, that's the only practical way to do it. Instead of bringing in one or two teachers at $40,000 a year, we can have 25 inmates at the top pay of $5 a day," says Hopkins, an Athabasca University professor who oversaw the training of several inmates as literacy tutors.

But many wardens are reluctant to lose inmates to tutoring when they're needed elsewhere. Says Archambault's Michel Des-Lauriers: "We need manpower to keep the place clean." In the penitentiary service, the wardens — and especially the regions — are strong; headquarters in Ottawa is weak. Kelleher may have said more use would be made of community volunteers in prison literacy but penitentiaries in Quebec and the Prairies haven't complied. Similarly, B.C. prisons encourage inmate tutors while other regions lag behind.

Such differences seem at odds with the service's Latin motto, *futura recipere* — grasp the future. Perhaps that's because one senior bureaucrat was sure it meant "future recipe".

Poems from behind bars

Examples of the work by Saskatoon prisoners in an adult language class.

REVERSE

Flowers in the field
Houses made of steel
Husbands and wives
People made of ice
Beat the kid
Maybe he'll live
Hereditary pass it on
Break the chain it don't belong
Not like you
Don't turn the screw

Flowers in the field
Houses made of steel
Husbands and wives
People made of nice
Love the kid
With love he'll live
Hereditary pass it on
Don't break the chain it DOES BELONG

—by J., Saskatoon Regional
Psychiatric Centre

Shock of pain springs to head,
and unwinds, into warm darkness . . .
amid, beautiful flashing lights . . .
the feeling,
so restful,
finally a peace,
I've found . . .
Ha! — now I leave you body,
flying, slow,
fast,
up,
and back down . . .
WHAT? go back—
no, no, . . .
spiritmind please—

—by Joe, Saskatoon Regional
Psychiatric Centre

NEWBORN TREE

Through my bars
And double glass
I can smell
The wakening grass
It makes me feel
So much alive
I close my eyes
And feel revived
It helps me see
That life goes on
Especially here
Where days are long
Yes I'm in jail
You've probably guessed
This part of life
Is such a mess
That's why it helps
So much you see
To watch the birth
Of a newborn tree
Through my bars
And double glass
Upon the shoots
Of newborn grass
It makes me want
To be out there
Outside that fence
Without a care
But then again I've realized
Once like you I'd shut my eyes
To the simple things in life you see
Like the simple birth
Of a newborn tree

—by Larry, Saskatoon Regional
Psychiatric Centre

Competency in military skills is no guarantee of literacy

The Canadian Forces don't have a literacy problem because these days they mostly accept high school graduates. But illiteracy among recent graduates is 17 per cent, according to the Southam Literacy Survey. And what about all those soldiers with just grade school education from 20 years ago?

The Canadian armed forces do not, repeat DO NOT, have a literacy problem. And that's official.

A brigadier-general said so in September, 1986. A lieutenant said so again the next month, after days of checking. Then, in September, 1987, after still more inquiries, both a lieutenant-colonel and a lieutenant-commander said so — emphatically.

Then why are roughly two dozen of the forces' brightest non-commissioned officers about to get weeks of special tutoring in reading and writing from literacy instructor Wendy Burton of B.C.'s Fraser Valley College? Burton says the college has provided remedial literacy instruction since 1981 for one small group among those regularly attending the Basic Officer Training course at Chilliwack.

They're senior non-commissioned officers with 15 to 20 years in the military whose reading ability tests below a Grade 9 level, the official cut-off point to be considered literate.

"We have regimental sergeant-majors who are incredibly competent in other areas and can read their orders as well as anyone else can, but they're labelled as functionally illiterate. I just don't accept that label." But she does accept that many of the two dozen NCOs are at a Grade 6 level and need Grade 12 to graduate among the 100 officers Commissioned From the Ranks (CFR).

And to Burton, that suggests the armed forces do have a literacy problem.

"I see the success stories," she says. "I see the ones who have risen through the ranks. I don't see the common soldier at all but we can see that the military has a problem with reading and writing. It's obvious." Not to the folks at National Defence headquarters in Ottawa.

Here's what their research shows:

- The educational levels of recruits have soared in the recession-plagued 1980s. Four out of five recently accepted as non-commissioned members — privates and up — have high school graduation or better.
- Real-life literacy problems have been reported from only one specialized navy category that requires skills in higher mathematics.

"It's not a sufficiently serious problem that it permeates very many of the levels within the military," says a personnel specialist.

But the specialist also points out that much of the Canadian forces training is delivered on-the-job where extra instruction can easily be thrown in to compensate for literacy failings.

Results from the Southam Literacy Survey suggest that such instruction is needed on a fairly regular basis in the armed forces. The survey found that one in six of recent high school graduates tested as functionally illiterate.

Studies in the United States armed forces show that military personnel spend two hours a day reading for their job, almost twice as much as their civilian counterparts. The range of reading tasks is also wider.

Military researchers in Canada speculate the armed forces have a "safety valve" of lateral transfers that probably takes care of literacy problems before they burst out in the open.

"If someone is in a technical trade where they're not happy — maybe it's a literacy problem — then they can do what we call 'remuster' and move into another area," says one researcher.

The same researcher also points out that a peacetime army is a giant training machine. Personnel with low literacy have constant opportunities to get help without entering special programs.

Back in Chilliwack, Burton says low literacy is concentrated among personnel who joined two decades ago with such low education that they can't go anywhere else now.

The absence of specific programs for literacy upgrading doesn't surprise her.

"The military would have to acknowledge that they have a literacy problem," she says. "The military would never do that." It did once, during the Second World War.

Faced with large numbers of functional illiterates, the army opened a special basic training camp at North Bay, Ont., in 1942 that provided double the normal eight weeks of instruction. Special literacy lessons were developed around daily military life, like this excerpt from the military textbook *Army Days*: "I am in the army and I live in a camp. In this camp I have a hut. I sleep in this hut. I can read and write in my hut. I can write my name. I march to my hut and I sleep in it." The literacy course was a success. Two-thirds of the functional illiterates acquired enough reading and writing in that extra eight weeks to be sent to advanced training camps where, says a research report from 1949, their enthusiasm and new-found pride made up for any lingering limitations.

"We would like to have whole companies of your men," a commander told the army literacy teachers back then.

Ownwords: the frustrations of being illiterate

It's not the most wonderful feeling. It tears you apart inside. All the people I've let down. It's just one lie after another.

literacy learner, Vancouver

Canadian youth score lower in literacy survey than American counterparts

There's no cause for Canadians to feel morally smug when it comes to educational comparisons with our U.S. neighbors. Young Americans read better and are more skilled at using everyday items like bus schedules than similar Canadians aged 21 to 25.

We're not as smart as we thought.

In the first literacy test across the 49th parallel, young Americans do better than young Canadians in more than two-thirds of the questions, the Southam Literacy Survey reveals.

The test compares adults aged 21 to 25 on largely identical questions given as part of separate nationwide literacy surveys.

The Americans clearly outperform the Canadians both in general reading proficiency and in using everyday documents such as bus schedules and the Yellow Pages. The two groups are roughly equal in understanding prose while Canadians edge slightly ahead when handling numbers.

Overall, the U.S. youth score 78 per cent correct compared to 74 for Canadians. One in five of the U.S. youth were either black or Hispanic. One in 10 of the Canadians were immigrants but all but a handful of those went to high schools here.

"This contradicts any illusions we may have of Canadian educational superiority," says psychologist Paul Nesbitt.

"The supposedly brightest age group of Canadians is significantly below Americans in reading proficiency. I have no reason to believe that is not true for the entire population," says Nesbitt.

Saskatchewan Education Minister Lorne Hepworth says the comparison is troubling because the U.S. is already lagging well behind Japan and West Germany in competitiveness.

"I think all of us have viewed the Canadian education system as one of the best in the world. So we have lulled ourselves into neutral. We never had to look over our shoulders and see anybody catching up."

American reaction was more cautious.

"If you say one group reads better or worse, it's important to know what tasks they do better or worse in," says Irwin Kirsch, project director of the literacy study published in 1986 by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), based in Princeton, N.J.

"You need to focus on the nature of the problem, rather than just the extent."

The 59 NAEP literacy questions were given in 1985 to 3,538 Americans aged 21 to 25. For Southam to get a comparison, the same tasks were slightly adapted for 334 Canadians in the same age range which was oversampled in the national survey of 2,398 adults. In 19 cases out of 20, the margin of error for the Canadian youth group is within five percentage points.

One glaring difference between the two nations is the high school drop-out rate. Roughly 25 per cent of these young Canadians did not finish high school, nearly double the U.S. average. Only inner-city blacks and Hispanics are as liable to drop out of high school as the average Canadian.

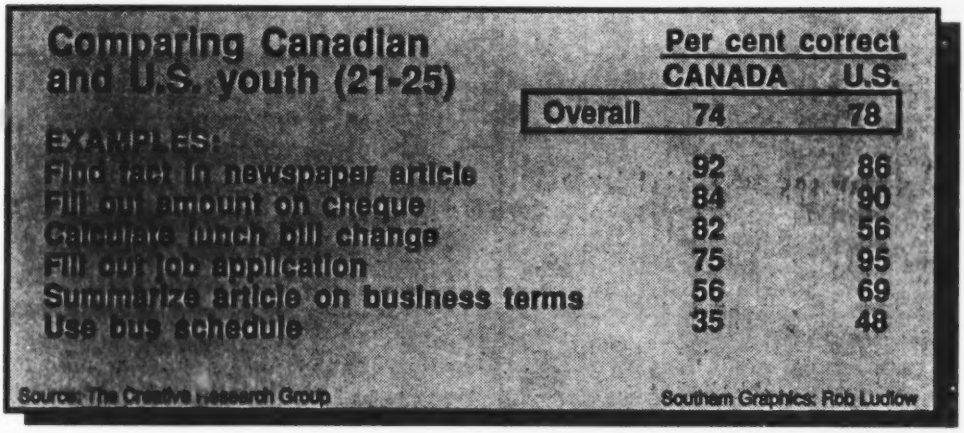
Among the Canadian dropouts, more than one in five is illiterate while one in eight graduates score as illiterate — 22 per cent versus 13 per cent.

Bilingualism can't be blamed for the differences between Canada and the U.S. Francophones were equal to anglophones — and sometimes better — on the Canadian literacy test, available in either language.

The lower reading proficiency of Canadians revealed by the test is considered large enough to be statistically significant and not just a chance result.

The survey shows Canadians fall down in the same places as Americans. They just fall down a bit farther.

Youth on both sides of the border perform reasonably well on school-type reading but have trouble with real-life written material that requires more complicated "information processing," like finding headings in the Yellow


Comparing Canadian and U.S. youth (21-25)
Per cent correct
CANADA
U.S.
Overall 74 78
EXAMPLES:
Find fact in newspaper article 92 86
Fill out amount on cheque 84 90
Calculate lunch bill change 82 56
Fill out job application 75 95
Summarize article on business terms 56 69
Use bus schedule 35 48
Source: The Creative Research Group
Southam Graphics: Rob Ludlow

Pages or summarizing general themes.

Less than half the young Americans correctly calculated the wait for a bus from a schedule. Only one in three young Canadians got it right.

Similarly, barely half the Canadians could correctly summarize an article on the vocabulary of business; Americans were also low, two-thirds getting it right. A U.S. analysis called these "distressing weaknesses."

Other findings:

- In general reading proficiency, Canadians did better on a history article but worse on a newspaper rescue story;
- In prose comprehension, Canadians did poorly on poetry but fared substantially better than Americans with a newspaper editorial;
- On everyday documents, Americans scored higher in twice as many questions, with Canadians especially weak on bus schedules and taking telephone messages;
- In dealing with numbers, Canadian youth briefly sparkled, outscoring Americans by 25 percentage points on the simple calculation of a lunch bill.

Concern over the low literacy of students is rising. Quebec Education Minister Claude Ryan said senior high school students wrote "as though they never studied grammar and syntax" when more than half failed an essay-writing test. The Liberals in Ontario made a $300-million budget boost for elementary schools a main campaign pledge.

In the past, most provinces opposed the creation of an independent agency to monitor education standards across the nation.

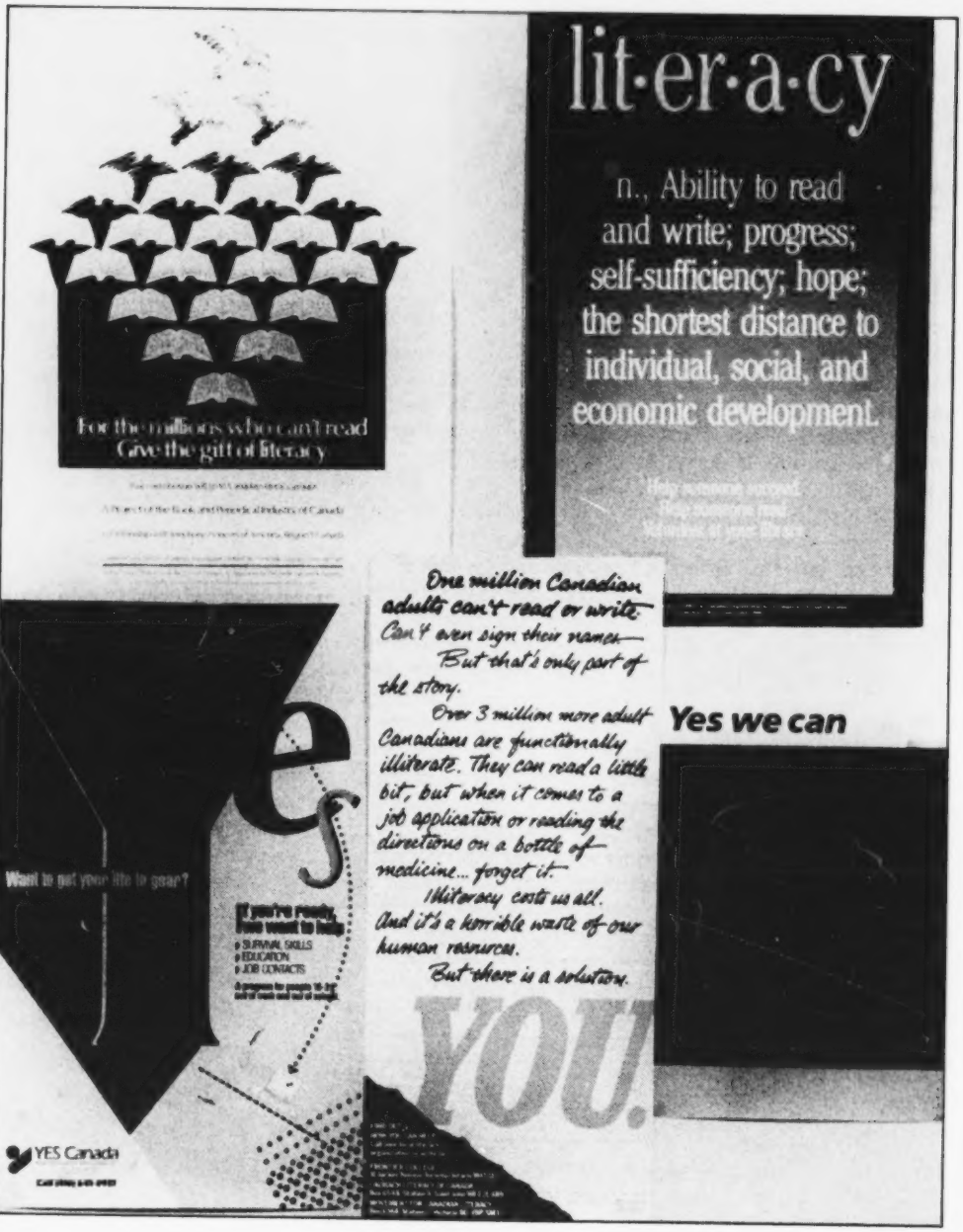
The resistance may be weakening. Ontario has joined an international comparison of high school mathematics.

"Evaluation can be a very valuable tool, especially if it's not taken too literally," says Bernard Shapiro, Ontario's deputy minister of education. "You can find out if things are going dramatically up or down."

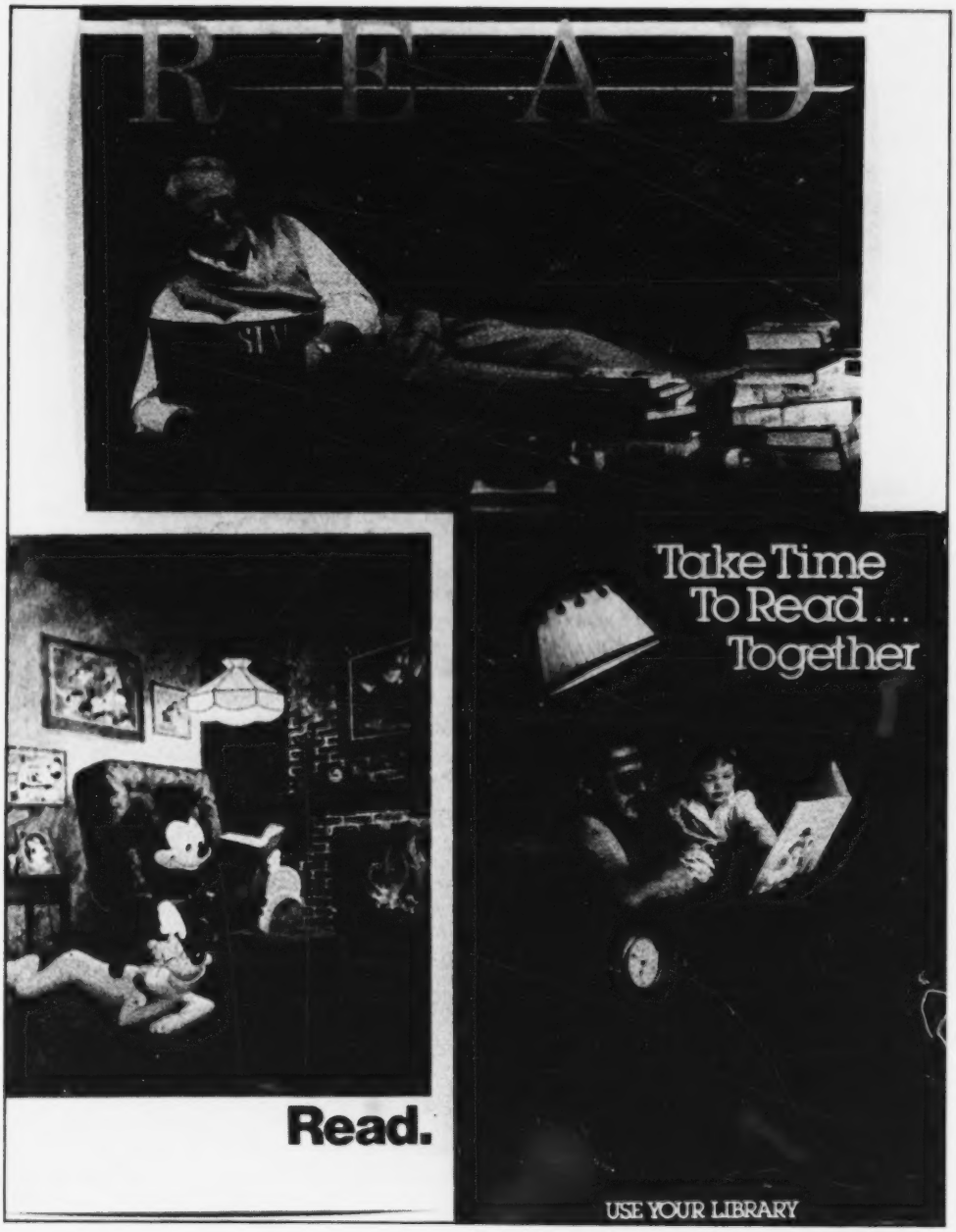
Many Canadians agree the standards of education are dropping — 39 per cent say grade school is worse today than when they went to classes. Thirty per cent say it has improved.

What's N.Y. stand for?

Community colleges, prisons and even the federal government buy American literacy material for Canadian students complete with questions about U.S. presidents and asking in which U.S. city Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. Learning to read is difficult enough without having to fight cultural bias.


lit·er·a·cy
n., Ability to read and write; progress; self-sufficiency; hope; the shortest distance to individual, social, and economic development.
Give the gift of literacy
One million Canadian adults can't read or write.
Can't even sign their names.
But that's only part of the story.
Over 3 million more adult Canadians are functionally illiterate. They can read a little bit, but when it comes to a job application or reading the directions on a bottle of medicine... forget it.
Illiteracy costs us all. And it's a horrible waste of our human resources.
But there is a solution.
YOU.
Yes we can
Want to get your life in gear?
If you're ready, we want to help.
• SURVIVAL SKILLS
• EDUCATION
• JOB CONTACTS
YES Canada

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



Canadian and U.S. literacy posters. The five Canadian posters shown are relatively bland when compared with eye-catching posters produced for the American Library Association featuring such well-known figures as Paul Newman and Mickey Mouse.

Already struggling to address an envelope in a literacy exercise, the young mother adds another furrow to her brow.

"What's N.Y. stand for?" Susan asks her tutor.

"That's New York." "Why not a province?" Before replying, the tutor darts a quick sideways glance to see if a visitor is listening. Then she says quickly, "It's an American book, there aren't any Canadian cities in it." The books at this session are from Laubach Literacy Canada, which raises about 80 per cent of its modest core budget from sales of teaching materials imported from Laubach's world headquarters in Syracuse, N.Y. Laubach isn't the exception, it's the rule.

"The large amount of American material doesn't bother me," says Bobbi Scarlett who runs literacy programs for the Calgary Board of Education.

"It's the same for adult education as for everything else _ our regular books, our television.

"Television is one of the best ways to raise public awareness and reach illiterates, even if the programs originate across the border."

Past experience told Canadian literacy organizations to plan for a rush of inquiries after actor Dennis Weaver appeared as an illiterate in ABC's movie of the week in September, 1987.

Laubach and ABC aren't the only ones to profit from cross-border literacy sales.

The American Library Association estimates it shipped nearly 50,000 literacy publicity items to Canada in 1987, mostly to libraries.

Sales got a boost from the popularity of David Bowie's Glass Spider tour because one of the association's celebrity READ posters features the singer peering intently into a Penguin edition of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*.

The Canadian market is also a profitable add-on for U.S. firms marketing literacy tests.

Prisons, community colleges and even the federal government purchase tests complete with questions about the Panama Canal, U.S. presidents and naming the American city where Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone.

Bell's invention of the telephone — in Brantford, Ont. — features in a series of pamphlets prepared for Canadian literacy students under a federal grant.

They're out of print. "Distribution of any Canadian literacy material is a major problem," says Audrey Anderson who self-published her book on tailoring a literacy curriculum to Northern Ontario.

"Mainstream publishers here wouldn't touch it if it didn't appeal to the American market." There's some hope. The Give the Gift of Literacy Campaign is planning grants to Frontier College, the Movement for Canadian Literacy and Laubach Canada to produce materials with a Canadian perspective.

The campaign might consider applying for one of its own grants.

Then it could use a Canadian design on its fund-raising poster rather than merely copy the much-praised U.S. poster.

"We thought we'd benefit from publicity that spilled across the border," says Nancy Fleming of the Book and Periodical Development Council.

"But there hasn't been as much as we expected."

Dreams in Technicolor: glitterati support literacy

The Barnum and Bailey fund-raising approach to help people learn to read gets its share of sneers. But that doesn't stop John O'Leary of Frontier College from dreaming in Technicolor.

When it comes to literacy, John Daniel O'Leary of Frontier College always dreams in Technicolor.

And as O'Leary gazes around the Briars golf club on the shore of Lake Simcoe, his cinematic dreams come to life.

Swinging clubs, hitching up gaudy plus-fours and pinning on literacy buttons are the likes of sportsmen Jake Gaudaur and Frank Mahovlich, publishers Bill Ardell, Jack McClelland and Michael de Pencier, actress Kathryn O'Hara, journalists Diane Francis and Shelagh Rogers, and lawyers Ralph Leon and Jake Howard — each paying $200 this summer day to be tooted at by the Great Lakes Brass Quintet, celebrated by poet Michael Ondaatje and exhorted by host Peter Gzowski.

"I hope some of you get infected with the same enthusiasm for the cause as I have," Gzowski says at lunch after the golf game.

Publisher de Pencier has. He shoves a wad of crumbled bills forward to enter next year's Third Peter Gzowski Invitational, automatically winning the prize for first to pay. Hoots of laughter rise from people who've just raised $20,000 for a good cause.

Most literacy groups in Canada have never tasted such excitement. They exist hand-to-mouth on genteel pleading for government grants and the meagre profits from car washes and bake sales. Yet many snipe at Frontier College.

"The whole literacy movement, not just the educators, are largely snobs," O'Leary says.

He's in Toronto now, at the former private mansion that houses Frontier, a college that gives no degree but has promoted literacy since 1899. As the director of development, the normally exuberant O'Leary watches over successful projects that find jobs for ex-convicts, help street kids to read and encourage good students to tutor poorer ones.

But right now John Daniel O'Leary is brooding.

A few literacy workers from outside have grumbled about another O'Leary Technicolor Triumph — Mila Mulroney reading to neighborhood kids.

"It's the leftist crowd," mutters O'Leary.

After all, who else would object to trying to

Terry Hancey photo.

CBC radio personality Peter Gzowski on the links at The Briars in Ontario at the 2nd Gzowski Invitational to raise funds for Frontier College's literacy programs.

Mila Mulroney reads to Toronto Grade 3 students at Frontier College to support its 90-year battle against illiteracy.

enlist McDonald's ("Ronald McDonald can bring back the excitement of mystery, adventure and information through reading"), or the NHL players association ("The name of the game is reading") or movie-house magnate Garth Drabinsky of Odeon-Cineplex ("You've seen the movie, now read the book") or Pizza Hut . . .

No Pizza Hut, ruled an outraged Toronto Board of Education. No way those foreign corporations will bribe Canadian students to read with soft drinks and pizzas.

Undeterred, O'Leary is now dreaming in CinemaScope, Dolby Sound, IMAX . . . literacy at the Winter Olympics . . . Wayne Gretzky touting books at an Oilers' practice in West Edmonton Mall . . . Sylvester Stallone at a Toronto bookstore . . . "He's the spokesman for the Give the Gift of Literacy campaign in the United States and we had a chance to have him visit here. People were appalled and it died. They're all teachers. They think the reason kids are illiterate is Stallone and McDonald's."

Unrepentant, O'Leary chuckles: "I love that Barnum and Bailey stuff." And just maybe the Give the Gift of Literacy campaign in Canada could have used the publicity, since the Canadian book industry's fight against illiteracy barely reached half of its first-year target of $100,000.

Book publishers are generous — this fall pledging roughly two per cent of royalties from 30 designated books, up from last year's 21. But the public only dropped about $35,000 into canisters in bookstores across the country.

That sounds like a lot to literacy groups like Vancouver's Carnegie Institute that buys textbooks from car-wash proceeds or Quebec's literacy coalition that uses posters from Chile because it can't afford to have one designed in Canada.

But John Daniel O'Leary isn't dreaming about books anymore. He's dreaming Michael J. Fox. On a poster. Encouraging kids to read. On buses. ON EVERY BUS IN CANADA.

In the U.S., high profile advocates, no funding

Illiteracy, American style, where caring is much more effective than money and there may not really be a solution. It's a hyped-up debate where the suggestion is that only perverts or Commies wouldn't read to their children. But some experts fear the publicity overkill pushed by Hollywood and the president will quietly evaporate as have previous battles to eradicate crime, poverty and drugs.

Under a poster that declares "America, Reagan Country" in red, white and blue stripes, Lynn Wood pantomimes a waitress, demonstrating how an Hispanic office cleaner was taught to read from menus.

Wood, a former staffer in the Reagan White House, is executive director of the National Advisory Council on Adult Education. She is also the woman who played waitress in her office after hours, taking make-believe breakfast orders from the Hispanic illiterate cleaner.

Welcome to illiteracy, American style, where free enterprise is the best solution and caring is much more important than money.

"If money is supposed to correct the problem," demands Wood, "then how can we have so many illiterates who went through the schools in the '60s and '70s, when money poured into education like an open water tap, in billions and billions?" Money matters, concedes Karl Haigler, the bureaucrat in charge of federal literacy funds. But what's really important is publicity and the backing of the top people.

"People say that the president is only giving it lip service. My answer is that it's the president's lips. At least he's talking about it." Everyone is. America is once again hurling war rhetoric to "combat our silent enemy." And what a celebrity cast of warriors: Sylvester Stallone, Paul Newman, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Goldie Hawn, Walter Cronkite, Malcolm Forbes, Dennis Weaver, Lee Iacocca, former chief justice Warren Burger, David Bowie, Erma Bombeck, cartoonists, newspapers, paper companies, the Library of Congress, IBM, Xerox, the U.S. Marine Corps . . . Illiteracy even made it to the Academy Awards last spring with a plea by producer Steven Spielberg "to renew our romance with the word." "Only a generation of readers will spawn a generation of writers," said the *Star Wars* producer.

Relaxing at the Harvard Club in New York, author David Harman reflects on the hyperbole.

"Illiteracy isn't the real problem in America. The problem is that they're eroding the culture of reading in this country. Did you ever see the president read a speech from a sheet of paper? No.

He reads from a teleprompter that's invisible to everyone else but him. No popular character on TV ever reads . . . He pauses, thinking. "Except on The Cosby Show." That tendency to balance both sides is why few in Canada have ever heard of David Harman or his thoughtful book *Illiteracy: A National Dilemma*. Even in the U.S., rival author Jonathan Kozol gets the invitations to tell congressmen why illiteracy lies behind everything from airline disasters to the eclipse of American supremacy.

U.S. illiteracy tends to be black and white, off or on, worlds of either priests or proles. Only perverts or Commies wouldn't read to their children is the suggestion.

Some experts are disgusted.

- Judy Koloski of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education: "It's not much use saying that you should read to your child, as our education department does, when the parent is illiterate."
- Paul Jurmo of the Business Council for Effective Literacy: "People try to oversimplify illiteracy. If you talk about the complexity, then their eyes glaze over."
- Finally, Michael Fox of PLAN (Push Literacy Action Now): "We've drawn the attention of the nation to this problem. Let's be a bit more honest now. Let's put aside the desire for public attention and get down to programs that can document some real change in people's social and economic life. The literacy effort needs to grow up." Fox is speaking at PLAN's rowhouse offices on the black side of Washington's invisible, but very

real, racial demarcation line. While keeping up an hour's running commentary for a visitor, the executive director of this community-based group also helps a Jamaican youth with fractions; gives tips to two tutors about literacy instruction in a power station; and occasionally pops into a classroom next door.

Behind the president's lips, the Hollywood pizzazz, the best-sellers and the lucrative lecture tours are thousands of dedicated, overworked and underpaid individuals like Fox who aren't making a dent in the problem, whether the totals are Kozol's 60 million to 70 million or the government's 25-30 million.

"Ninety-five per cent of the literacy programs in this country aren't addressing the problems that cause illiteracy," says Fox. "They're oriented to changing the individual, not the system. They're defining the problem as an educational problem, rather than political, social and economic." Political, like using needlessly complicated language in food stamp applications. Political, like state governors urging mandatory classes for any illiterate on welfare. Social and economic? Listen to an illiteracy slide-and-tape show from the American Newspaper Publishers Association.

"A permanent and growing underclass who will become a burden on the literate and a potential for disaffection and violence. . . . The time is rapidly approaching when the burden will break the back of our society." Yet what concerns people like Michael Fox, Paul Jurmo and Judy Koloski more than such publicity overkill is the opposite possibility, that this "war" too will quietly evaporate as have previous national campaigns to eradicate crime, poverty or drugs.

Says Fox: "Grassroots literacy efforts have been somewhat co-opted by the state governments, creating the impression that volunteers can solve the problem, which they cannot, that lots of money is coming forth, which it isn't, that lots is being done. And it isn't." Back at the National Advisory Council on Adult Education, Lynn Wood is squishing her lips like a fish. That's how she taught a Japanese fellow skier to pronounce "enthusiast." Literacy in America has lots of them. But for how long?

The failures of formal education

Frank Smith abandoned newspapering for a Harvard PhD and a career as an internationally acclaimed writer and lecturer on reading, writing and children's literacy. His latest book is called Insult to Intelligence.

ON SCHOOLS

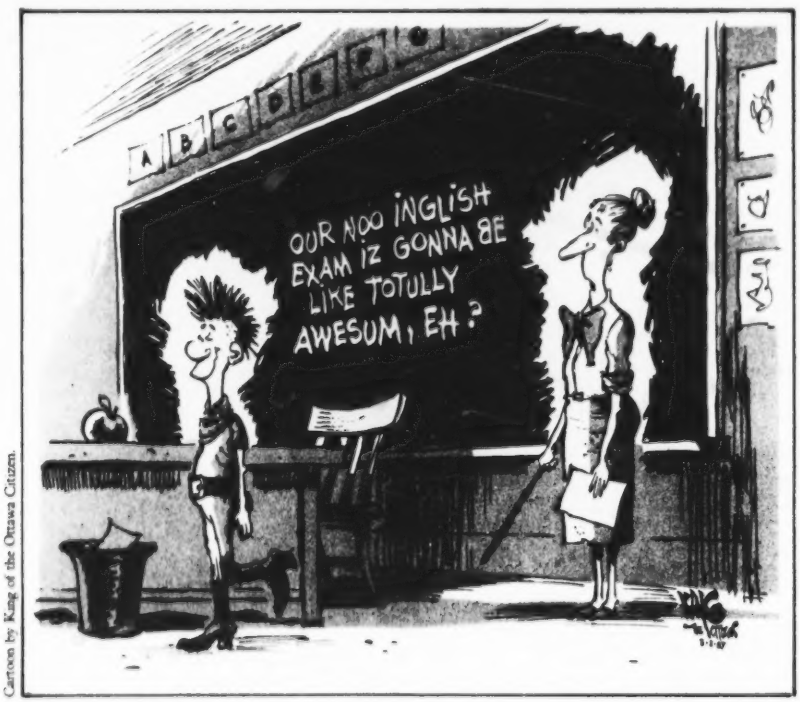
Schools aren't good places for learning any more than hospitals are good places for being sick in. It's very, very difficult to learn in school, including university. People learn much more outside of school. . . .

REGIMENTATION

Most kids know a good deal about reading before they come to school. Every kid can read the word McDonald's. Most kids know what the television guide is for. Most kids can read store signs, they can read product labels, things like that. They know about writing birthday cards or leaving notes on refrigerator doors. They've got a good idea what reading is for and what writing is for. I think most kids are almost there by the time they come to school. What school says to kids is forget all of that, that's outside of school. Inside of school, reading is a whole set of exercises, a whole set of drills. Kids are very lucky if they see anything that makes sense to them in reading instruction in schools. Most of the time they're filling in blanks and answering stupid questions when they've read stupid stories. . . .

ON TEACHING

You know the best people for reading to five-year-old kids in school? It's seven-year-olds, not the teachers. And not the good readers but the mediocre ones, because the good readers



Cartoon by King of the Ottawa Citizen.

'That's absolutely correct, Billy.'

will come on too strong and act like teachers and pick up all the mistakes. You don't need someone who is a brilliant reader, you just need someone who is a little better than you. . . .

WHAT'S WRONG

If you persuade a kid that he can't write, then it's very, very difficult to get that kid to write. He does everything wrong. He worries about spelling, he worries about punctuation, he worries about all these things we say are the basics. He never gets off the ground. Well, it's much the same with reading. If you persuade a kid that he can't read, what he'll start doing is all the things that are wrong — he'll struggle to sound out every word, he'll read too slowly, he'll read and then try to memorize everything that he reads. All these things destroy reading. But by the time you've been in school for 10 years or so, it's totally habitual. The problem with the adult illiterate is not that they have no idea how to read but that they've got all the wrong ideas about reading. . . .

WHO TEACHES BEST

The people who really teach you to read and write are the authors that you read. You CAN teach yourself to read by reading a newspaper. You've got to read something that you know a good deal about in the first place, so if you know a good deal about sports, you read the sports report. There's a lot of evidence that that is the way kids learn to read and learn to write. Kids read stories written for children that are very predictable, that they've read 30 times, where they know every word in advance. . . .

READ FAST

Reading's very much easier if you read faster, if you skim. If you're having difficulty reading a book, don't slog through it slowly and then go back and read it quickly. Go through it quickly first time, so that you can get a good idea of what it is about, and then read it slowly. . . .

ON LEARNING

We've all got learning disabilities, everyone has. I've tried for years to understand automobile engines and I still don't. I bet you can't understand the stock exchange, or do algebra or can't speak a second language, or whatever. It's not because we were born with some bit missing in our brain. At sometime we were persuaded that this was something we couldn't learn and once you're persuaded that you can't learn something, then in fact it's very, very difficult for you to learn something. All your study habits go wrong and your attitude goes wrong and your motivation goes wrong and especially what goes wrong is that the people who try to teach you, try to teach you in a different way. They treat you like an idiot. . . .

DON'T BLAME TV

The evidence is that people who read a lot also watch television a lot. Television doesn't destroy reading. If you're a reader, television can stimulate reading and promote reading. People watch Masterpiece Theatre and then go read the original novel. A lot of kids read the book spinoffs from the Saturday morning cartoons. In a sense, I think television is wrongly blamed for illiteracy.

In their own words: writings from students in adult language classes

Fervor and vehemence, sentiment and discernment — all of these a student can now express in the written format, as progress in adult language classes instills feelings of pride and purpose.

I think it is hard to find a job today. I tried very hard to get a job. I don't have a job now. I'm on welfare. I can't find work. My brother and son have good jobs. I wish I could find a job too. I know lots of people who don't have jobs. It is a very bad time for work. We don't have many job opportunities. It is the Government's fault.

—By Grete, Saint John, N.B.,
Learning Exchange

GROWING UP IN ITALY

I was living in Cellara which was a small town in Italy. It was around 1946. We lived on a farm which was about a ten minute walk from the city. On the farm, we grew grain and fruits. We also raised animals.

The school was in the town. I would go into my house and grab some bread and salami. I would eat this while I walked to school. School started at nine o'clock.

All of the teachers were very strict but some were worse than others. If you were not listening, the teachers would punish you. Sometimes they would hit the palm of your hand with a wooden stick. Other times the teacher would make the student bring in some gravel from outside. The student would put the gravel on the floor in the corner. Then the teacher would make the boy or girl kneel on the gravel for about half an hour.

—by Vince, Ottawa Board
of Education

I am Theresa . . . of Toronto Ont. I'm originaly from Montreal Que. I'm hoping for a nursing position in the community upon graduating from my upgrading course. Basically I have a great love for people. I know if we push ourselves towards a set goal in life with will power & positive thinking plus a strong mind, we can & will get that goal diploma etc. So everybody reach for your Rainbow. never give up.

—by Theresa, Frontier College,
Toronto

The feeling I get when I am behind the wheel of car is some how unexplainable all I can say is that I get a natural kind of a high it is even a better high than I get from drugs or booze. And driving is something that comes natural to me.

—by Joe, Frontier College,
Toronto

TORONTO BLUE JAYS

The team is a very good team This year when they win! Watch the team on CTV or Montreal, on CBLT in Toronto. We may not be in The World Series I would love to see toronto and Montreal in the world series. it would do Toronto good if the toronto team got in a series.

The Toronto Fans would Love it. If the Toronto hockey club plays better we will see good hockey on tv too.

—by Tom, Frontier College,
Toronto

BACK TO SCHOOL

It is difficult to return to school. I have been out of school for a long time. Also the school work has changed a lot over the years, and I thought it would be a lot harder too. I thought because of that I would not be able to do it. I

also thought that going back to school was for the young kids not for older people. But I have found out that there are more older people in class than young people. The school is not as hard as I thought. In fact it is very easy when the teacher explains it to me. I am learning a lot that I have forgotten. All in all, I am glad that I went back to school as I have learned a lot and I have met some nice people my own age there.

—by Jean, London, Ont.,
School of Alternative
and Continuing Education

MY DOG

We have a little Llasa Apso dog. Her name is Fluffy. She plays with a little ball and puts it under the couch and barks until you get it for her.

My wife and I went to Oshawa on the weekend. We took Fluffy with us. She enjoys the ride in the car. She was tired when we got home because she played with my son's dog. His name is Mikey. He is a pug.

—by Wally, London, Ont.,
School of Alternative
and Continuing Education

WHY EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT

I think education is the most important thing in a person's life, second to health. It's like raising a child and having to train mentally and morally, and providing schooling, training for a person's faculties. It is also a serious responsibility.

In my own life, I am happy to see some of my training is paying off, yet I am saddened by the lack of academic training and the loss of opportunity. I thank God for the chance to return to school a second time in my life to get a modern education. For there is simply no room in this whole wide world for an uneducated boy or girl. Yet history has a long list of places and people who may never get a chance to be educated and grow to their fullest potential.

Illiteracy and lack of communication are like a blindfold over one's eyes and mind. This is why, it is my strong feeling, that the world will not see the peace and love that I dream of. Humans have a long history of thriving on each other's weaknesses, so education and communication to me, is the food that every human being needs to grow into a healthy person.

—by Joseph, London, Ont.,
School of Alternative
and Continuing Education

Boredom a reason for high dropout rate

Forty or 50 years ago, students usually quit school to help on the farm or to put food on their family's table. Now, many dropouts say they leave school because they're bored.

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"Dropping out of school never done me no harm."

Students don't quit school anymore because their parents need them to help at home or on the farm. And hardly anybody has to take a job so the family can eat.

But those were big reasons why Canadians aged 55 or more failed to finish high school.

Meanwhile, younger Canadians drop out because they don't like school — twice as common a reason than for older adults — or because they don't see any good reason for continuing.

"In the '70s and '80s, people stop themselves from staying in school; older Canadians were stopped by outside forces, often financial," says Dr. Paul Nesbitt.

The study uncovered this shift in the reasons for dropouts by examining the answers of nearly 800 adults who hadn't graduated from high school. Well over half of the older group talked about being blocked, one-quarter of the time for financial reasons.

By contrast, half those aged 18 to 34 mentioned boredom, lack of interest in education or wanting to work as their drop-out reasons. Another 20 per cent blamed the school system.

These findings suggest educators will have a tough time making much of a dent in Canada's drop-out rate of roughly 30 per cent. But the survey singled out quitting school as a major cause of illiteracy.

Among those aged 21 to 25, for example, illiteracy is almost double for school dropouts — 22 per cent versus 13 per cent for high school graduates.

Ownwords: the frustrations of being illiterate

This year I filled in my own income tax and that's not bad for a guy who didn't know what school was.

Ed Chartrand, mid-30s, Vancouver

What works to combat illiteracy

From books to broccoli, literacy groups have devised dozens of approaches that work.

1. YES CANADA

Sally is reviewing calculations for volume and area, Tom is practising fractions, Daryl is laboring at prepositions, Lee is brushing up sentence composition, Robert is finding reasoning a breeze, Diana is getting help on the colon and semicolon and Doug is marking test answers on a card that can be read by a scanner.

Heather Armstrong is teaching all seven, helped by one human assistant and several hundred microchips in 10 computers.

Just as the publicity claims, YES (Youth Employment Skills) Canada in St. Catharines, Ont. operates like an electronic one-room schoolhouse, right down to the instant marking.

"Only 35 per cent," says a downcast Doug when the scanner spews out his test grade.

It's just a temporary setback in the newest approach to tackling the problem of jobless youth between 16 and 24. Similar projects started in spring 1987 in Halifax, Winnipeg and Vancouver, largely financed by a $3.1-million federal grant.

Early results are encouraging. The dropout rate is 13 per cent and about two-thirds of the first participants in the three-month program now have jobs.

"We don't subsidize the associates to attend — that's almost an article of faith with us," says spokesman Karen Englander.

Literacy is only part of the YES Canada package, which also emphasizes job skills and leadership.

"I sell motivation and attitude to employers very strongly. They're not getting just another person off the street," says employment co-ordinator Dianne Granacki.

Photo by Hamilton Spectator.

Unemployed youth catch up on reading, writing and arithmetic as part of YES Canada program in St. Catharines, Ontario. Other classes are held in Halifax, Winnipeg and Vancouver.

Ottawa Citizen photo.

Read-along kit allows less literate people to listen to audio tapes and follow along in an abridged, large-type version of such classics as Tom Sawyer.

2. EDIBLE READING

A literacy program in Toronto provides a little food for thought to its participants.

Workshops for students at East End Literacy relate everyday skills, like cooking, to the formal training in reading and writing. While some learn to knit or macrame, others are in the kitchen.

They prepare a menu, food budget, shop for the ingredients and learn to read recipes, helped by tutors. The students also keep a list of all unfamiliar words — from apple to zucchini — encountered along the way.

"That's what functional literacy is all about," explains co-ordinator Elizabeth Cooke. "They are taking basic skills and applying them to their daily lives."

3. BOOK BUDDIES

Winnipeg tots are discovering books and libraries with a little help from their "bookmates." The Bookmate program, established in 1984, is aimed at children three to five from homes where English is not spoken.

The youngsters are matched with a bookmate, a volunteer who takes them to the library once a week to read a book, look at pictures or just spend time together.

"We've had children who were very shy and quiet come into the program and within six months become very verbal," says executive director Donna Biglow.

As many as 175 tots a year are matched with mates who "can be anybody from a 16-year-old high school student to a grandmother who goes to Las Vegas in the winter." Biglow says the program also seems to encourage more library use by the immigrant or native parents of the children.

The Bookmate idea has caught on in Alberta, Ontario and on northern Manitoba native reserves.

4. EASY READING

"Oh, I dasn't Mars Tom, Ole missis she'd take an' tar de head off'n me. 'Deed she would." Don't worry, that tongue-twister isn't found in an abridged version of *Tom Sawyer*. But Tom still displays his guile in the famous whitewashing scene for which Mark Twain wrote that black dialect.

And the Read-Along kit for *Tom Sawyer* even explains that whitewash is "a kind of white paint." Read-Along is a new breed of stories-on-tape, aimed at children and adults who have reading problems. The 50-plus stories have been shortened but an accompanying book contains exactly the same abridged text as the tape.

Type in the book is larger than normal and

not crammed together. A coil binding allows the book to lay flat.

"We didn't simplify the vocabulary because specialists say that's condescending to adult learners. And we didn't add any music or bleeps for the same reason," explains Christine Tierney of Audio Language Studies.

At $30 apiece, the series also includes *Smiley's People* read by author John le Carre; *Break In*, a Dick Francis thriller; *Moby Dick*; and *Oliver Twist*.

A catalogue is available from Audio Language Studies, 25 Mallard Road, Don Mills, Ont. M3B 1S4.

5. LITERACY AT CITY HALL

A personal appeal from a co-worker inspired a city employee in Saint John, N.B., to pioneer one of Canada's only literacy programs inside a city hall.

A member of the municipal workers union approached union official Brian Logue two years ago and confessed he was illiterate.

Logue remembers: "He was depressed so I referred him to an assistance program. He committed suicide later." The possibility that illiteracy contributed to the suicide inspired Logue to set up a literacy tutoring program for municipal employees on advice from the Saint John Learning Exchange, a literacy centre.

"One person helps another, both benefit. Sometimes it's easier if they work side-by-side." Posters and word-of-mouth spread the news. Twelve tutors were recruited on a volunteer basis from different departments. City hall bought the books.

And now there are more than a dozen students.

Logue says: "It's been successful because there was no pressure put on people. They weren't promised a job promotion if they passed or to be fired if they didn't."

6. BIG LITERACY

Ed Markovitch is beaming — and when a gypsy beams, it's dazzling.

"I'm going to be skipped two levels to Advanced 2. It will be a lot more challenging," he blurts out.

Daniel Watts says quietly: "You're probably the only one in the class who will skip, the rest of us are all dummies." This revealing exchange took place at the King Edward Campus of Vancouver Community College, home to more adult literacy students than any other single location in Canada. All 300 available spots are snapped up a few days after registration begins.

"We'd really like to have continuous enrolment, but like all programs, you have to beg for the dollars you get," says Cindy Onstad, head of adult basic education at the college.

Markovitch was one of those who returned. "I know where I'm going now and I know how I'm going to get there," says the 35-year-old, who once sold used cars from the curbside.

"I want to give my kids something, not just teach them how to sell a car." The course works for Markovitch because each adult learner is treated individually. Explains one staff member: "We can't dish out the same stuff year after year. We have to be flexible and fit the curriculum to the students, rather than the other way around." It also works for Watts. He's registered again.

7. WORK TO LEARN

At Ottawa's ALSO literacy program, some students literally work to learn.

They work as cleaners in office buildings, giving them both the money and the motivation to continue literacy classes.

"Many people who take literacy classes are on social assistance and often it's hard for them to focus on literacy when they are suffering under the fist of poverty," says ALSO head Mike Kelly.

They also become discouraged at the time it takes to become literate.

To overcome these obstacles, ALSO (Alternative Learning Styles and Outlooks) last year started an industrial cleaning company. Run as a co-operative, it provides part-time work for seven people and has helped three people leave the welfare roll.

The students learn to fill out invoices, cheques, bank deposit slips and read instructions on cleaning solvent containers.

Literacy instruction at ALSO is different as well. Students decide when to attend classes, how often to attend and what they want to learn.

8. LEARNING IN TANDEM

I-CARE may be the best-named literacy program in the country.

Individualized Community Adult Reading Education describes perfectly what Douglas

College offers and caring is what the volunteer tutors contribute.

Other community colleges offer literacy classes, but Douglas in New Westminster, B.C. was the first to combine the back-up resources of a college to the flexibility of volunteers.

The arrangement works well for Lorne Gibson and Isabelle McMeekin, one of the program's 60 tutor-learner pairs.

"I'm retired and I wanted to do something more with my time than sit around, watch TV and eat cookies," McMeekin says.

"I couldn't understand why my wife would curl up in bed and read a book," says the 43-year-old Gibson. "I thought she was neglecting me." After a series of twice-weekly tutoring sessions with McMeekin, Gibson is now curling up with a simplified version of *Reader's Digest* and a dictionary.

9. POWER OF THE PRESS

The *West Coast Reader* gets the message across at three levels.

The award-winning, monthly newspaper offers current, easy-to-read information to more than 75,000 adults — in British Columbia, the Yukon and Northwest Territories — who are learning to read.

"They're so proud to be able to read a newspaper," says Joan Acosta, the one-woman team behind the paper. "You can read it on the bus and no one knows you have trouble reading." Started in 1981 largely for immigrants learning English, the tabloid-sized paper is today read by adult literacy students, the deaf, stroke victims and prison inmates.

Acosta uses articles and illustrations from the two Vancouver daily newspapers, rewriting stories to three increasing levels of difficulty.

Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and Nova Scotia have similar newspapers published by the provincial governments.

10. CALL THIS NUMBER

Hamilton residents have information about literacy at their fingertips, thanks to an innovative hotline now being copied elsewhere.

The telephone hotline directs callers to literacy as well as academic programs run by the three local boards of education, the Laubach literacy council, several library branches, Mohawk community college and other social services.

"Literacy programs are expanding and it's confusing for adult learners trying to figure out who to call," explains information officer Lee-Ann Johnson.

More than a quarter of the calls this year have been about literacy. Since the hotline was established three years ago, the 3,000 inquiries have identified nearby areas which need new services.

Groups in Ottawa, Kingston, London and Toronto are using Hamilton's hotline as a model.

11. KIDS AND BAG-LADIES

Toronto's Beat-the-Street campaign has had more publicity than all the country's other literacy programs combined.

And, it's about to get more by expanding to Winnipeg.

The program teaches reading and writing to about 500 teenagers, most of whom live on the streets. As much as literacy, Beat-the-Street is also about survival skills. Some bag-ladies take part as well.

There were doubters at the beginning, among them the Toronto Board of Education. And the federal youth ministry cut back Beat-the-Street's expansion plans. Yet inquiries from the United States are further proof that Frontier College has another winning idea.

12. LITERACY CORPS

The 1985 youth tutor project was supposed to mobilize unemployed young Canadians and channel their enthusiasm into a national literacy corps.

In theory, it was a good idea and the project had its share of success.

"The influx of youth was a great boost to local literacy councils," says Thelma Blinn, the project's Atlantic region co-ordinator.

The project heightened the morale and public profile of Laubach Literacy of Canada, which administered the program. The result was also new literacy councils, more learners and full-time work for some youth tutors.

But there were problems.

Tutors were paid only $60 a week, on top of unemployment insurance, for 30 hours of instruction. Turnover was high.

The project recruited nearly 250 youths aged 18 to 25 as tutors. When the $1-million federal grant ran out in the spring of 1986, about a third

of the tutors had already left for full-time work or school.

The idea isn't entirely dormant. Laubach executives still think a youth literacy corps is a good idea. And so does Senator Edward Kennedy, who is promoting the concept in the U.S.

13. EASY READING

Over the past two years, Eliza Little Mountain has helped a lot of B.C. natives understand how unemployment insurance works, even though she's mere centimetres tall.

Eliza is the star of a comic book called *Collecting Pogey*, one of the more unusual publications financed by the pioneering Legal Services Society.

"We work on developing material that can be used by people with low literacy who feel alienated from the law," says the society's Carol Pfeifer.

Consider the pogey book. Eliza, a laid-off cook, walks readers through 32 pages of explanations as she applies for unemployment insurance, with a five-year-old daughter in tow.

Even with her daughter's paper airplanes flying around the UIC office, Eliza manages to avoid just about every bureaucratic trap, meanwhile pointing them out to others.

The society's biggest seller, however, is *Can We Make a Deal*, a Plain English explanation of the laws that most affect people.

14. HELP

Two summers ago, three hot dog carts appeared in Kingston, Ont. The hot dogs were good, the carts were clean and the vendors were former prisoners.

"It got them used to meeting people again, and they had to be on time and handle money," explains Tom French of the HELP program.

But usually, HELP doesn't create jobs — it finds them.

In one year, a dozen staff members from five HELP offices in Ontario knocked on 28,000 doors to find 4,500 jobs.

The job-placement program started after Toronto's Frontier College discovered ex-offenders put work ahead of literacy training when they got out of prison.

So HELP first finds jobs and then directs the ex-inmates to literacy tutoring. And next summer, it will also direct them to three hot dog carts, resurrected after a temporary layoff.

Similar programs operate in Vancouver and Quebec.

15. QUADRADIC LITERACY

At Montreal's Dawson College, literacy means more than learning your ABCs.

For the past three years, it's also meant practising writing in algebra class. Physics and math instructors ask students to write summaries of lectures or a list of questions.

"It involves the breaking down of barriers between disciplines," says Linda Shohet, co-ordinator of the college's Literacy Across the Curriculum program. "If language was really used in all subjects there would be fewer illiterate students."

16. LEARNING DISABLED

Students at Calgary's Foothills Academy are learning how to learn.

They are children with average or above average intelligence who have learning disabilities thought to be caused by nervous system disorders.

"They appear to be bright, normal kids but they can't learn," says fundraiser Linda Hays. "They're seen as being unmotivated or spoiled by their parents." Gordon Bullivant, Foothills executive director, says as many as 20 per cent of Canadian school children have learning disabilities like dyslexia and hyperactivity that prevent them from learning in the normal school system. They usually wind up in special education classes.

Bullivant says there's nothing magical about Foothills, which has 111 students from six to 20 years old. Teachers work closely with students to build their self-esteem and find ways for them to learn.

After an average of three years, Foothills students return to the regular school system.

17. HOT OFF THE PRESS

There will likely be a new weekly columnist on the Saskatoon newspaper scene in January.

That's when the *Star-Phoenix* newspaper intends to start running a column written by a literacy learner. In larger-than-normal print, it will summarize the news for adults just learning to read.

"The learners' voice needs to be heard," says Georgina Kyle, co-ordinator of the Newspapers

in Education program that the *Star-Phoenix* is broadening to include adult learners.

Kyle says promoting literacy should be a priority among newspapers. Not only does it boost learners' self-esteem, it should also eventually increase newspaper circulation.

18. BOOKSHOWS

What do Mila Mulroney and Argo quarterback John Congemi have in common? They've both recently been the star of a Frontier College Bookshow, a staged event that throws children together with their idols.

The idols just happen to feel like reading a book so the kids listen, discuss their favorite reading and then get to select a book to take home.

19. AND EVEN MORE MODELS:

- Quebec's literacy coalition negotiates grants with the provincial government for many community groups. No other provincial umbrella body comes close to such stature.
- Ontario's Independent Learning Centre offers literacy instruction through cassette tapes to 900 students.
- Special help for immigrants and poor parents so they understand the education system. Experience shows these parents then take a more active role in monitoring their children's education.
- London, Ont. has a model day-care program for children of adult literacy and language students held in the same schools the parents are attending.
- Provincial training materials are jointly produced for tutors. Alberta and Manitoba have just done this.

Ownwords: the frustrations of being illiterate

I always wanted to read **Tom Sawyer . . .** ***all my friends had.***

Ed Markovitch, 35, Vancouver

Tipsheet on tutoring

Drawing on years of language-training experience, Frontier College president Jack Pierpoint and education consultant Marsha Forest provide an array of pointers for prospective tutors and parents who want to start their children on the right road to reading.

Tell me, I'll forget. Show me, I may remember! But involve me and I'll understand . . . People who cannot read and write come in all shapes, sizes, colors, religions and ages. They fit no neat orderly pattern, and therefore require creative flexible approaches.

People who want to help other people to read and write also come in all shapes, sizes, colors, religions and ages. They too fit no neat orderly pattern.

Our experience at Frontier College has proven to us that all people are capable of learning and that trained tutors can unlock doors into new futures and new hopes for students.

The key to our approach is that it is designed to serve the needs of the students. "What do you want to learn and how can I help you?" is the major question we train our tutors to ask. This is based on the belief that people know what they want but are often not encouraged to ask.

Research shows the best programs have simple philosophies. Our's can be summed up very simply: "We believe in our students." We look for tutors who see the glass as "half-full" not "half-empty." We want people who see other people as full of potential and ability — not empty jars to be filled or fixed with prescriptions.

Most of our tutors work one-to-one at the beginning, but peer tutoring and group work can accomplish equal results. The key is the people. So, in screening potential tutors, we look for the following qualities:

1. People who believe that everyone can change, grow and develop all through their lives.
2. People who have many interests and networks.
3. People who like to read and write.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD TUTOR?

Let's look at a few tutors and see if a pattern emerges.

Richard: Age 35, spent 15 years in prison, high school education, a skilled woodworker, three children.

Mandy: Age 47, PhD in English literature, single, teaches at university.

Shafik: Age 25, some university, loves to read, wants to travel, was in a car accident and uses a wheelchair.

Devinder: Age 57, elementary teacher, speaks French, writes children's stories, has seven children.

Linda: Age 39, lived in an institution half her life, was labelled mentally handicapped, learned to read and write through Frontier program, now married and working.

What do all these people have in common?

- They all volunteered to tutor.
- They are all willing to attend training sessions and make at least a six-month commitment to a person.
- They are all people who see possibility and capacity.
- They all can live with a system that uses no tests, no labels, and no set recipes for learning.
- They are all flexible, open and friendly.
- They all like to read and write.

In almost every other way they are different, and that is necessary and desirable.

BEGINNING TACTICS FOR TUTORING

Relax. Have a coffee together. Talk. Exchange stories. Then . . . Find out everything you can about student. How? By asking. Slowly. Don't push. Create an autobiography. Their lives, wishes, dreams, fears, hopes. Not just age, weight, height — but how they feel, what their passions are. Also share who you are. Never ask what you yourself are unprepared to answer.

Be a good observer. Use your eyes and ears to see and hear what the student is telling you.

Learn about your students by observing their lives. How do they interact with you, with others. Keep a record of your observations for planning your curriculum. A successful curriculum will begin WITH not FOR the student.

You are teaching people to read and write. You therefore must do the same. Read aloud to students each session. Have them dictate a story to you. Read it back. Voilà! there it is, the student has a story in print. Save these stories. When the students can read, let them read their own stories aloud to you, to others.

If you have a paper and pencil you are ready to begin. Sure expensive books and materials are good, but if you can't get them, go to the library. Make friends with the local librarian. For adults use adult materials. It is insulting and degrading to teach adults with material made for children. Some great starters include a telephone book, the Yellow Pages, local newspapers, advertisements, T.V. guides, and menus.

Use music. Play records. Read lyrics.

Give students an assignment they can succeed at. Something interesting and relevant. Example: Have them orally interview their own family members.

All this is an assessment technique. You are trying to determine: who is the student; what are the student's strengths; and what are the student's needs. Be very specific. Does the student want to read letters, material at work, a newspaper, grocery products, songs? Based on the needs, set goals and target dates with your student. Review this often and modify it as needed.

TUTOR MAGIC — THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

We have observed volunteer tutors at work

Patrick Travers, 7, helps brother Ben, 3, with a little bedtime reading. Getting an early start on reading increases literacy in later life.

and are convinced the thing we do best is to allow people to see their strengths and become confident that they can learn. We replace DIS-ability and IL-literacy with self confidence and meaningful skills.

For example, Thomas, 25, was one of the millions who slipped through the system. He could not read or write a word. He was convinced he was stupid as he was a graduate of the special education system. He was labelled slow, learning disabled, dyslexic. He believed every word. A volunteer tutor met Thomas. They got to know one another. The tutor asked what Thomas wanted — what his dreams were. Three key areas emerged.

- An avid interest in woodworking.
- A desire to be a mechanic.
- A love for his five-year-old twin nieces.

There is the curriculum. Enough for any good tutor to work on for months.

Using Thomas's interests, an individualized program is created. Thomas learned quickly as the material was totally relevant to his life. He learned to write about cars, and how to fix them. He joined the library and took out books on woodworking and cars. He and his tutor practised filling out job applications and role-played for interviews. Within six months, Thomas was reading and writing, and found a job doing renovations at $11.00 per hour. He also convinced his mother to get a tutor.

Another student, Lance, decided he wanted to attend his tutor's university classes — and go to university. Lance, labelled mentally handicapped, had not finished elementary school. Did Gloria, his tutor, tell him to "be realistic" or did she trust Lance enough to invite him to her course to see if he enjoyed it? Lance (on his own) decided it was "too much reading and writing" and that he'd visit once in a while. However, he did like the university and now works as a courier from the central office.

SUMMARY OF KEY ELEMENTS IN A GOOD LEARNING SITUATION

- The tutor and students are active participants.
- There are more chances for success than failure.
- Lots of student/tutor-made materials relevant to learners.
- Learning is interdisciplinary, i.e. math is related to art, and reading is part of everything.
- The tutor is consistent, but also flexible.
- The tutor refuses to let students give up.
- The tutor believes all people can and want to learn.

In short, anyone interested in tutoring and reading this article CAN tutor someone who has trouble reading and writing. There is no mystery or magic involved. Years of experience have shown that ordinary citizens involved in literacy programs can work small miracles on a daily basis.

Call any literacy program in your community and ask if you can help. You can volunteer in a wide variety of programs and places — including schools, institutions like hospitals and prisons, workplaces — but most important with your family and friends.

You don't need a degree in English to read to a child and demonstrate to them the magic of books. You can change the future for a child with 15 minutes a day. It's not much to ask. And the rewards are mutual.

LITERACY IS A COMMUNITY ISSUE

Literacy is not merely a matter of schooling. It is fundamental to our way of life. Thus the responsibility and opportunity to resolve the critical problem of illiteracy rests with us. We can do it. We have the skills and the talents. We are the resources. We can make Canada a nation of readers.

Fifteen tips to increase literacy

Illiteracy can't be wiped off the map in Canada. But here are 15 tips, gathered from the Southam Literacy Survey and from literacy experts, to widen the magic circle of readers.

AT HOME

1. Read to children, read with children, read out loud, read silently, read alone, read together. Discuss the story and talk about the meaning of words.
2. Seize every chance to pass along tips about written language to children. For instance, point out the letters of their names on signs.
3. Watching television is inevitable, so talk about the programs. Encourage children to call out letters on the screen.
4. If you have trouble reading, consider cassette tapes with follow-along books for you and the children.

IN THE SCHOOLS

5. Ask questions. Of the teachers, the principal, the board officials, the school trustees. Ask how reading and writing levels compare between schools and how the board fares on standardized evaluations. Demand that the provincial education ministry produce a layman's guide to what works in teaching and learning, as the U.S. education department did last year.
6. Perhaps the school system baffles or intimidates you. There are others equally baffled. Form a discussion group and ask local social service agencies, trade unions or community colleges for help.
7. Volunteer as a teacher's aide in schools.

IN THE COMMUNITY

8. Investigate the needs of the local literacy programs. Not everyone is cut out to be a literacy tutor but there are other ways to help.
9. Encourage the library to stock books and cassette tapes for adult learners and to follow Winnipeg's example of pairing adult "bookmates" with preschoolers.
10. Agitate for city hall to write public notices that are easily understood and also to offer literacy tutoring for municipal employees, as in Saint John, N.B.
11. Churches, clubs and professional associations are natural jumping-off points for a new literacy drive in the community.
12. Look to your local newspaper for leadership. No one has a bigger stake in literacy. And ask what literacy program is available for the paper's own employees.

ON THE JOB

13. Employers can get in touch with either Laubach Literacy of Canada or Frontier College for information about literacy tutoring in the workplace. Union members can demand more emphasis on adult education provisions in contract bargaining.

IN THE NATION

14. Write and inform federal and provincial representatives of your keen interest in literacy. Inquire when the government will start a literacy program for its own employees.
15. Lobby governments to make Plain English the rule for all official publications. Return examples of bureaucratic gobbledegook. Demand to know why federal and provincial governments haven't yet established an independent national education commission to monitor educational standards.

Peter Calamai

Even for a journalist used to big projects, it was an overwhelming assignment.

Peter Calamai spent five months criss-crossing Canada and the United States, interviewed more than 100 literacy experts, educators and bureaucrats, and devoted countless hours talking to illiterate Canadians.

Add to that seven revisions of the Southam Literacy Survey questionnaire that eventually went into 2,398 Canadian homes and you get a picture of Calamai's life since March. The 44-year-old national correspondent for Southam News says it was the most satisfying — and rewarding — assignment in a career that began with the police beat at the *Hamilton Spectator* in 1966.

"I had no idea how pervasive illiteracy is."

What impressed Calamai most about his assignment was the diversity of illiterates in Canada.

"I met a lot of people I would never have guessed were illiterate. These are articulate and seemingly confident people who simply cannot read or write very well.

"Some illiterates were total wrecks. But even then their illiteracy was part of a larger group of problems. Illiteracy doesn't sit on its own." Calamai is one of Canada's most honored journalists.

He is a three-time winner of the prestigious National Newspaper Award, most recently in 1985 for his reporting of the Supreme Court of Canada.

He joined Southam News in 1969 as an Ottawa-based science writer. Four years later, he began a series of postings in London, Vancouver and Nairobi, ending up back in Ottawa in 1983 after eight months on a Southam Fellowship at Massey College in the University of Toronto.